

# UCL iMerc Newsletter — Vol. 26, May 2026

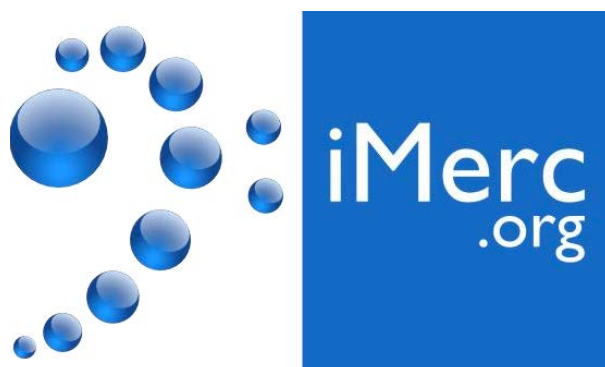
## About us

Over the past 20 years, we have been developing the International Music Education Research Centre (iMerc) at the UCL Institute of Education to celebrate and disseminate our extensive research in the field of music education, broadly conceived, and to hear about new research from colleagues elsewhere in the world. In the beginning, we often held our research seminars over several days, such as in different European cities to allow our doctoral students to have more intensive support as a community, to listen to local researchers, and to share their ongoing research journeys. These 'Travelling Research Seminars' visited Ireland (Limerick), Spain (Barcelona), Italy (Bologna) and Sweden (Malmö) and helped us to establish our international profile and sense of community. With the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, we have been meeting more regularly, both online and in person, to continue to share new research and insights related to diverse topics in music education. We are a group of researchers at doctoral and post-doctoral levels, as well as senior researchers, with a shared curiosity and interest in advancing basic and applied research. In line with our mission, the monthly seminars continue to foster a sense of shared endeavour amongst colleagues who are based in the UK, across mainland Europe (such as Portugal, Germany, Greece, Skandinavia), Asia (China, including Hong Kong), Latin America, USA and Australia. Opportunity is taken each month to be informed of research

news and various current research projects, including opportunities to listen to the latest research from our invited speakers. If you would like to know more or to join us, please contact us.

Our upcoming UCL iMerc Research Seminar will take place on **Wednesday, 20 May 2026**, 11am-1pm BST via Zoom and in room 943 at the IOE . We are pleased to invite you to join us online [HERE](#) or in person if there is no Tube strike in London! Everyone is welcome!

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1 - Credit: iMerc

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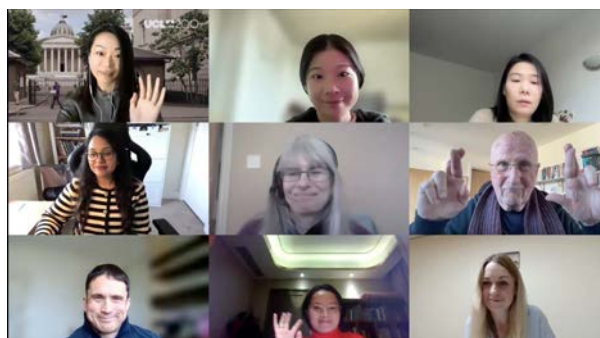
## 11. Contact us

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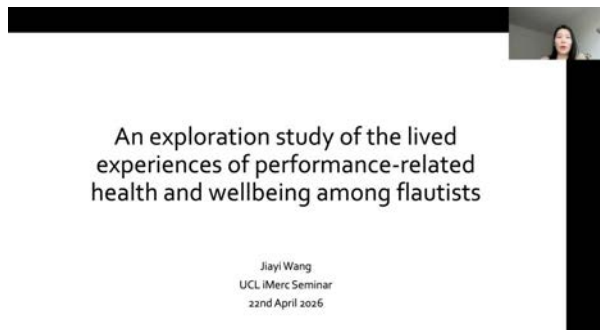
### Previous UCL iMerc Research Seminar, 22 April 2026



2 - Credit: iMerc



3 - Credit: iMerc



4 - Credit: Jiayi Wang

### **Jiayi Wang: An exploratory study of the lived experiences of performance-related health and wellbeing among flautists**

Jiayi's ([jiayi-wang@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:jiayi-wang@ucl.ac.uk)) presentation explored the lived experiences of flautists, focusing on performance-related physical discomfort, injury, mental health, and the strategies musicians use to manage these challenges in practice and performance. While music performance science research has expanded in recent years, flautists remain comparatively underrepresented despite the distinctive physical and psychological demands associated with the instrument. The study aimed to provide flautists with an opportunity to reflect on these experiences in their own words and to consider the personal meaning attached to them across their musical lives.

The study was conducted during and immediately after the COVID-19 pandemic and involved a pre-interview questionnaire followed by semi-structured Zoom interviews, including a 'River of Flute-playing Experience' activity. Findings highlighted that participants had all encountered performance-related health and wellbeing challenges at different points in their lives and careers. The presentation reflected on the importance of resilience, adaptability, and supportive social connections, while also emphasising the need for more comprehensive health and wellbeing education and resources within music education and training.



5 - Credit: Sandra Oberoi

### **Sandra Oberoi: The Ecology of a Musical Life: Understanding Youth Musical Identity Formation in Post-liberalisation Bangalore**

Sandra's ([sandra@harmonybangalore.com](mailto:sandra@harmonybangalore.com)) presentation explored an example of how musical identity develops within a rapidly globalising urban India. Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of nested development, Sandra conducted semi-structured interview with an 18-year-old Tamil Brahmin musician, examining how family, education, social environments, and wider cultural forces shape and reshape a young musician's sense of self.

The presentation highlighted musical identity as an evolving negotiation between inherited traditions, personal interests and emerging global influences, rather than a fixed or linear journey. Beyond a single personal story, the case reflects the experiences of many young musicians in post-liberalisation India, where caste, class, gender, digital access, and transnational aspirations increasingly shape creative identities and opportunities.



6 - Credit: Shike Guo

## Shike Guo: The Relationship Between Music-Related Characteristics and Stress Among Chinese Adolescents: An Integrated Model of Musical Sensitivity, Musical Identity, and Music Engagement

Shike's ([shike.guo.23@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:shike.guo.23@ucl.ac.uk)) presentation examines the role of music in adolescent stress and emotional wellbeing among Chinese young people. Combining questionnaire data from 219 junior secondary students with interviews involving 12 participants, the research explored how musical sensitivity, musical identity, and music engagement relate to perceived stress experiences during adolescence.

The findings showed that a strong musical identity acted as the most significant protective factor against stress, while musical sensitivity revealed a more complex role, offering both emotional support and potential vulnerability. Overall, the study highlights the nuanced ways that young people engage with music and how these individual relationships can shape emotional wellbeing and stress regulation.

### Webinar Invitation: *Being Seen, Being Heard, Feeling Connected*



7 - Credit: Sing Up Foundation

Join the Sing Up Foundation to launch our new publication, [Being Seen, Being Heard, Feeling Connected](#), on 13 May 2026 13.00-14.00 BST, exploring singing and vocal work for children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. Presentation, panel discussion and Q&A. Free to attend.

What can singing and vocal work really do for children and young people's mental health and wellbeing? The Sing Up Foundation has been talking to practitioners, researchers and young people, and what we're finding is full of possibility.

Being Seen, Being Heard, Feeling Connected is our new publication bringing together over 50 sources of evidence, practice insight and lived experience. To mark the launch, we're hosting a free webinar featuring a presentation of the publication's key themes, followed by a panel discussion with:

- Professor Graham Welch, Chair of Music Education at UCL Institute of Education, one of the world's leading researchers on singing and child development
- Ben Turner, Teach First Ambassador and founder of Rap Club, whose work uses rap, beatboxing and creative vocals to build connection and confidence with young people
- Baz Chapman, Joint Head of the Sing Up Foundation and lead author of the publication
- Facilitated by Katherine Zeserson, Chair of Sing Up, musician and strategic facilitator

There will be plenty of time for your questions and to join the conversation. Whether you're a teacher, music practitioner, music organisation leader, or anyone working with children and young people, we'd love you to be there.

Can't make the date? Register [HERE](#) for the recording.

## Event Invitation: *The Science of Song*

The Science of Song

Sat 6 Jun 2026 | 7:30 pm - 9:30 pm

As part of our 'Inful Hallel' theme for the year, join us for an evening exploring the science of singing. Hear Professor Ian Cross discuss his new research in conversation with David Halls, the Cathedral's Director of Music, and Lynsey Docherty, Artistic Director of Cathedral Voice. You will also have the opportunity to take part in an interactive singing experience, exploring rhythm and harmony. Absolutely no experience necessary.

**Event Information**

**Date:** Sat 6 Jun 2026

**Price:** £20 adult, Student £12

**Timings:** Doors open 6.45pm  
7.30pm - 9.30pm

**Location:** Salisbury Cathedral

[Book now](#)

*8 - Credit: Professor Ian Cross, Salisbury Cathedral*

Professor Ian Cross ([ic108@cam.ac.uk](mailto:ic108@cam.ac.uk)) will join David Halls and Lynsey Docherty for [The Science of Song](#) at Salisbury Cathedral on 6 June 2026. The conversation will explore how singing shapes human connection, wellbeing, and collective experience, drawing on research into the social and psychological effects of making music together.

Bringing together perspectives from science, music, and cathedral life, the event will examine why communal singing continues to play such a powerful role across cultures and traditions. Set within one of Britain's great choral institutions, the discussion highlights growing interest in singing not only as artistic expression, but also as a vital form of social connection.

## Online Event Invitation: *Learning to Teach Music in the Secondary School (4th Edition)* Book Launch



9 - Credit: Birmingham City University Events

The fourth edition of *Learning to Teach Music in the Secondary School* brings together leading researchers and teacher educators to reconsider what it means to teach music in contemporary classrooms. Across the book, authors explore how music education is being reshaped by changing curricula, digital practices, inclusion agendas, assessment practices, and developing understandings of musical knowledge and creativity.

This online launch (June 10th 2026 4-5 pm Online) will introduce the key themes of the new edition and open a wider conversation about the purposes, practices, and challenges of secondary music education today. Through short provocations from contributing authors and a panel discussion with the editors, the session invites teachers, researchers, and students to reflect on the tensions and possibilities currently facing the subject.

The event will be interactive, with opportunities for attendees to contribute questions.

## New Book Launch: *Music Teaching for Special Educational Needs*



10 - Credit: Faber Music, Dr David Baker

Dr David Baker ([david.baker@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:david.baker@ucl.ac.uk)) recently published a new book, [Music Teaching for Special Educational Needs](#) for instrumental teachers, music educators and researchers who are working to create more inclusive learning environments. Drawing on current research and practical classroom experience, the book explores approaches to supporting students with Dyslexia, Autism Spectrum Disorder, and visual, auditory and physical disabilities. Packed with case studies, reflective activities and practical teaching strategies, it offers a thoughtful and accessible guide for anyone looking to deepen their understanding of inclusive music pedagogy.

We are also delighted to offer a special discount for PhD students and the iMerc community interested in exploring this new publication. Use the code MUSICTEACHING25 at checkout to receive 25% off your purchase through Faber Music. This is an excellent opportunity for postgraduate researchers and educators to access a comprehensive and timely resource supporting inclusive and accessible music education.

The accompanying interview, [New Music Teaching for SEN Published Following Demand from Industry](#) further explores the motivations behind the project and the wider conversation around accessibility and inclusion within music education today.

## Newly Published: *Singing with Strangers: The Social Significance of Music*



11 - Credit: *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Neta Spiro, David Duncan, and Ian Cross

A new study in *Journal of Consciousness Studies* by Dr Neta Spiro, Dr David Duncan, and Professor Ian Cross finds that singing together can rapidly strengthen social bonds, even when participants are noticeably out of tune. The team paired strangers and asked them either to sing “Happy Birthday” together or play a cooperative memory game. Both activities increased feelings of closeness, but the brief singing interaction produced especially powerful effects despite lasting only about 30 seconds.

Importantly, Spiro, Duncan, and Cross found no meaningful link between musical accuracy and social connection. What mattered was not singing well, but singing together. Their findings suggest that shared musical participation, even imperfect and awkward participation, may foster empathy, trust, and a stronger sense of belonging.

Spiro, N., Duncan, D., & Cross, I. (2026). Singing with strangers: the social significance of music. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 33(3-4), 78-100.

<https://doi.org/10.53765/20512201.33.3.078>

## New Album Release: *Piano Catarse*, Luciana Hamond



12 - Credit: Luciana Hamond

We are pleased to share the release of *Piano Catarse*, the new album by pianist and neoclassical composer Dr Luciana Hamond, professor in the undergraduate and graduate Music programs at the Federal University of Mato Grosso, in Cuiabá, Mato Grosso, Brazil. The album was made available on major digital platforms — Spotify, Amazon Music, Apple Music, Tidal, Deezer, Pandora, among others — in April 2026.

*Piano Catarse* brings together nine original solo piano compositions, conceived from improvisations created during the period of social isolation in the COVID-19 pandemic. These pieces emerged as a deeply personal musical diary, shaped by introspection, emotional vulnerability, and the search for renewal through sound. Later transcribed, recorded, and transformed into fully developed works, they reveal an intimate and contemplative sound world within the universe of neoclassical piano music.

The tracks — *Uncertainty, Eclipse, Paths, Enlightened Night, A Bird's Dream, Calm Water, Steps Towards Infinity, Palpitations, and Sliding* — portray an emotional and existential journey in which music becomes a space for catharsis, healing, transformation, and connection.

With this release, Luciana Hamond continues to develop an artistic trajectory marked by the integration of piano performance, composition, academic research, and creative practice, consolidating her presence in both the national and international musical scenes.

The link to your preferred platform: <https://soothesounds.lnk.to/PianoCatarse>

UCL iMerc Research Seminar, 20 May 2026

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*Guest Speakers: Professor Ian Cross and Dr Neta Spiro*

*Topic: Singing with Strangers: The Social Significance of Music*

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13 - Credit: Professor Ian Cross



14 - Credit: Dr Neta Spiro

**Ian & Neta's abstract:**

The idea that led to the topic of this seminar is that the primary function of making music together is to enhance a sense of mutual affiliation between those who participate rather

than to produce a euphonious sound. This is not a new idea; there is now a huge amount of empirical evidence that when people make music together they are likely to experience a sense of enhanced closeness, and ethnomusicological studies have long suggested that, across numerous cultures and societies, joint music-making underlies social solidarity. Virtually all experimental studies that have shown this relation between group music-making and sense of sociality have involved groups in repeated and fairly formal musical interactions, almost always involving musical scores and guided by normative standards of musical performance; little is known about the effects on social bonding of one-shot, informal and unrehearsed musical interactions.

The present study explored whether feelings of closeness would be affected by the quality of a musical interaction, measured in terms of how in tune singers are with each other. Pairs of same-sex strangers ( $N = 162$ ) with a broad spread of backgrounds and singing abilities either sang a familiar song together ('Happy Birthday') on first encounter or played a cooperative card memory game. Both activities resulted in an enhanced sense of connection between participants even though the singing bout (at ca. 30 s) was significantly shorter than the card game. The quality of joint singing (in terms of fit between participants' tuning) did *not* significantly influence its bonding effects, suggesting that the social effects of singing can be independent of its quality. Singing together — particularly in informal settings — may be of more significance as social act than as appealing sound.

**Professor Ian Cross** ([ic108@cam.ac.uk](mailto:ic108@cam.ac.uk)) is a Fellow of Wolfson College and Emeritus Professor of Music and Science at the University of Cambridge, having taught in the Faculty of Music from 1986 to 2021 and founded the Centre for Music & Science there in 2002. His widely-cited research on music encompasses psychoacoustics, cognitive neuroscience, experimental archaeology, evolutionary theory and the social effects of musical interaction. His current preoccupation is with the ways in which participatory music, understood as a medium for affiliative interaction, relates to the means of managing social order in different cultures that are interpretable as law. He is also a classical guitarist.

**Dr Neta Spiro** ([neta.spiro@rcm.ac.uk](mailto:neta.spiro@rcm.ac.uk)) is Reader in Performance Science at the Royal College of Music, Affiliate Researcher, Centre for Music and Science, Faculty of Music, University of Cambridge, and an honorary Research Fellow at Imperial College London. Two questions underlie her research: What is the potential role of music in peoples' health and wellbeing, and what is communicated when we make music together? Her recent work has explored, for example, how to increase equitable access to musical care during the beginning of life, which has led to policy recommendations that have been used in parliament, as well as family and music organisations as part of making the case for the importance of music in early life. Her work on shared understanding in ensembles has explored how similarly music makers think when they make music together.

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*Speaker: Dr Pauline Black*

*Topic: Turn on, zoom in, bop out: Experiences, attitudes and beliefs regarding jazz and improvising*

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15 - Credit: Dr Pauline Black

**Pauline's abstract:**

Although featured in various UK music education curricula, there is evidence to suggest that many music teachers in the UK do not teach jazz and improvising. Some UK secondary schools may have a jazz or groove-based ensemble of some nature, but this is not at all commonplace in schools. This presentation draws on case study research from a wider mixed methods study exploring experiences, attitudes and beliefs regarding jazz and improvising in UK secondary schools. This Scottish ethnographic case study of an extra-curricular jazz ensemble (in person and online) allowed for zooming in on fine details of practice. Case study data comprised of observations, interviews (n = 9) and focus groups with young people (n = 7) as well as interviews with the music teacher. The data were used to gain insight into experiences of learning and teaching in jazz and improvising and to explore these experiences, attitudes and beliefs and the factors which enhanced or restricted access and perceived success in jazz and improvising.

Enabling an ethos where students felt empowered to develop their skills in improvisation, from an early age and at a pace suitable to their own development was evident in the jazz ensemble. Although there were many different levels of experience present in the jazz ensemble, the music teacher managed to engage all meaningfully in the sociocultural space through the use of inclusive pedagogy allowing for student autonomy and participation. The

evidence showed that online rehearsals in the Zoomosphere (MacDonald et al, 2021) supported a feeling of community, participation and belonging, as well as being a positive environment for finding a way into improvising as a beginner. Building a digital community was culturally relevant and a very successful support. Students did not connect composition activities within the jazz ensemble to their classroom based composing.

Using a lens of participatory music (Turino, 2008), I argue for using improvisation as a means to develop musical, social and emotional skills and to disrupt issues of hegemony within a predominantly western art music focused curriculum. I also argue that the in the moment responsiveness or pedagogical improvisation (Holdhus et al, 2016) demonstrated by the music teacher played a huge part in the success of the jazz ensemble. Implications include challenging conventional notions of jazz and improvising in order to increase access to musical learning for a more diverse range of learners, as well as connecting geographically isolated learners.

HOLDHUS, K., HØISAETER, S., MAELAND, K., VANGSNES, V., ENGELSEN, K.S., ESPELAND, M. and ESPELAND, Å., 2016. Improvisation in teaching and education—roots and applications. *Cogent Education*, 3(1), p.1204142.

MACDONALD, R., BURKE, R., DE NORA, T., SAPPHO DONOHUE, M. and BIRRELL, R., 2021. Our virtual tribe: sustaining and enhancing community via online music improvisation. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, pp. 623640.

TURINO, T., 2008. *Music as social life: The politics of participation*. University of Chicago Press

**Dr Pauline Black** ([p.black@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:p.black@ucl.ac.uk)) is a part time Lecturer in Music Education at the UCL Institute of Education, London. She is also Deputy Principal of the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) Orkney, as well as being PGDE Music lead for UHI. Pauline was previously a Senior Lecturer at the University of Aberdeen where she held various roles, including Head of Music, Head of Music Engagement, Programme Director of the Music Education Degree, MMus Dissertation Supervisor, Ensembles Coordinator and Performance Coordinator. She was formerly a secondary school music teacher and departmental head and also has experience of working as an instrumental tutor in school and community contexts. Pauline has been External Examiner for Music Education and Music degrees at the University of Huddersfield; University of Sunderland; University of Northumbria and UCL. She is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. Pauline has a wealth of music industry experience and is currently Chair of the Jazz Promotion Network, Co-Chair of Jazz in Education UK and Past President of the Independent Society of Musicians (ISM).

Pauline enjoys performing in a range of genres and styles, on trumpet and voice. She also enjoys facilitating and directing performances with others. She specialises in creative music making projects, jazz, improvising and collaborative projects using a range of instruments and music technology.

Pauline regularly peer-reviews for a number of leading music education journals and she has published various articles on music education. She has presented at various national and international research conferences as well as delivering sessions at music teacher conferences. Pauline's research focuses on the lived experience of different communities and how they perceive music and multi-arts projects. Her research uses a range of qualitative and quantitative research methods. Pauline's PhD was an exploration of the teaching and learning of jazz and improvising in UK secondary schools. Her research has included focusing on creating new discourses surrounding excellence and inclusion within music interventions; issues of gender in relation to confidence and improvisation and collaborative composing using technology.

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*Speaker: Inès Chiaramonti*

*Topic: Algorithmic Recommendation in the French Music Industry: Platforms, Cultural Policy, and the Limits of Governance for Artist Development*

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16 - Credit: Inès Chiaramonti

### **Inès's abstract:**

The cultural consequences of algorithmic recommendation on streaming platforms remain insufficiently understood in markets where states have historically regulated musical exposure. France presents a distinctive case: it maintains francophone broadcasting quotas, a dedicated public body for the music sector, and a streaming-specific tax. Yet these instruments were designed for broadcast environments and have not been extended to personalised algorithmic mediation. Existing scholarship has examined recommendation architectures, listening diversity, and platform-driven creative pressures across separate disciplinary traditions, without incorporating the technical knowledge of actors who design, operate, or contest these systems from within.

This study employed a mixed-method design combining an online questionnaire completed by 79 French streaming users with seven semi-structured interviews with professionals across playlist curation, platform management, recommendation engineering, independent distribution, artistic creation, rights administration, and licensing. Data were examined through thematic analysis, cross-referencing survey patterns with professional accounts and situating both against existing scholarship.

Six thematic findings emerged. Listeners reported strong perceived control despite frequent autoplay use and near-absent attempts to configure algorithmic outputs. Emerging French artists faced a traction-first barrier: recommendation systems responded to pre-existing momentum rather than initiating exposure. Platform metrics exerted tangible pressure on track structure and release strategy, with creative adaptation largely self-imposed. The visibility of French-language repertoire was jointly governed by algorithmic ranking, editorial programming, and contractual clauses, yet this curation remained invisible to listeners. Informational and contractual power was unevenly distributed, constraining independent actors disproportionately. Both institutional and technical informants judged broadcast-era governance tools unworkable for personalised recommendation, while generative AI introduced unresolved disputes over training-data rights. These dynamics carry significant implications for the professional development of emerging musicians, who must increasingly learn to navigate algorithmic systems, platform metrics, and the technical logics shaping their visibility in order to sustain a career in this industry. The study recommends replacing content-based obligations with transparency-centred oversight, including disaggregated reporting of recommendation outputs by language and origin, independent diversity audits, and a presumption of use for AI training data.

Inès Chiamonti ([ines.chiamonti.21@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:ines.chiamonti.21@ucl.ac.uk)) is a final-year BSc student at UCL. She grew up between Paris and New York, and spent her year abroad as a marketing and promotion intern at Sony Music España in Madrid. Her dissertation examines how algorithmic recommendation shapes listener autonomy, artist discoverability, and cultural policy in the French music industry. She speaks French, English, and Spanish, and will begin an MSc in Marketing at HEC Paris in September 2026.

## Congratulations!

Join us with our warmest graduations on Dr Zhengyi Du ([zhengyi.du.20@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:zhengyi.du.20@ucl.ac.uk)) for passing her PhD Viva with minor corrections. Her thesis title is *Investigating the Impact of Digital Technologies on Higher Education Students' Creativity and Musical Creativity: Focus on Project-Based Learning and Chinese Cultural Heritage*, supervised by Professor Evangelos Himonides and Professor Graham Welch.



17 - Credit: Dr Amy Johnston



18 - Credit: Dr Amy Johnston



19 - Credit: Dr Amy Johnston

Many congratulations on Dr Amy Johnston for her successful conference presentation, sharing insights into music training of generalist teachers in special schools. Please read Amy's message:

I had the opportunity to attend the recent EAS Conference in Vienna. The theme of the conference was 'Advance Democracy: Participation, Diversity, and Social Cohesion in Music Education'. There were lots of fantastic presentations from all areas of music education. I contributed to two presentations at the conference based on my own doctoral research and my professional experience as a special school music teacher.

The first was a shared workshop with Dr Anna Backman-Bister from the Royal College of Music in Stockholm. The title of the workshop was 'Finding Common Ground: Strategies for teaching music to children with SEND - snapshots from England and Sweden'. This workshop explored an intersection of knowledge between the practice of in-service generalist teachers in special schools in England and music teachers in Sweden. Suggestions of the Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) required for teaching music to pupils with SEND, and the training required to develop this with both groups of practitioners, were shared and discussed. Practical examples highlighted the importance of teachers' knowledge and competence, including: selecting appropriate and accessible instruments and notation; movements, non-verbal strategies, cues for teaching musical concepts; and principles for adaptations (Backman Bister et al., 2025; Johnston, 2023).

I also presented a spoken research paper based on my doctoral research (Johnston, 2023), with the title of 'Insights into the music training of generalist teachers in special schools: implications for SEND music-pedagogical practice'. My research examined the efficacy of a skills-based teacher development and mentoring model in SEND music. The research paper revealed what this model looked like, exploring connections with the music CPD of generalist teachers in mainstream schools. New links with early years music pedagogy were also outlined (Bremmer, 2021) and therefore, with the music CPD of early years teachers.

## Upcoming Seminar

Please note that our next and final UCL iMerc research seminar of the academic year will be on Wednesday, 24 June 2026, 11.00am BST. Please mark this date on your diary. If you're interested in sharing your work at a future seminar, we'd love to hear from you. Please feel free to get in touch. Thank you for all your continued engagement!

## Contact Us

Visit us on the website at <https://www.imerc.org/>

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