TRINITY
COLLEGE LONDON

RESEARCH EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The impact of Trinity College London international Music exams, educational resources and teacher training on Music teaching and learning in Italian public schools

Trinity College London 2026

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Purpose and context

This Executive Summary presents the key findings, implications and future directions of a national project carried out between 2019 and 2023 within the framework of a Memorandum of Understanding between Trinity College London and the Italian Ministry of Education and Merit, through the National Committee for the Practical Learning of Music for All Students.

Trinity and the National Committee pursue a number of guiding principles in their work to promote the role of music in education:

◗ Music is for everyone

◗ Practical music education plays a fundamental role in the cognitive, emotional, social and cultural development of students

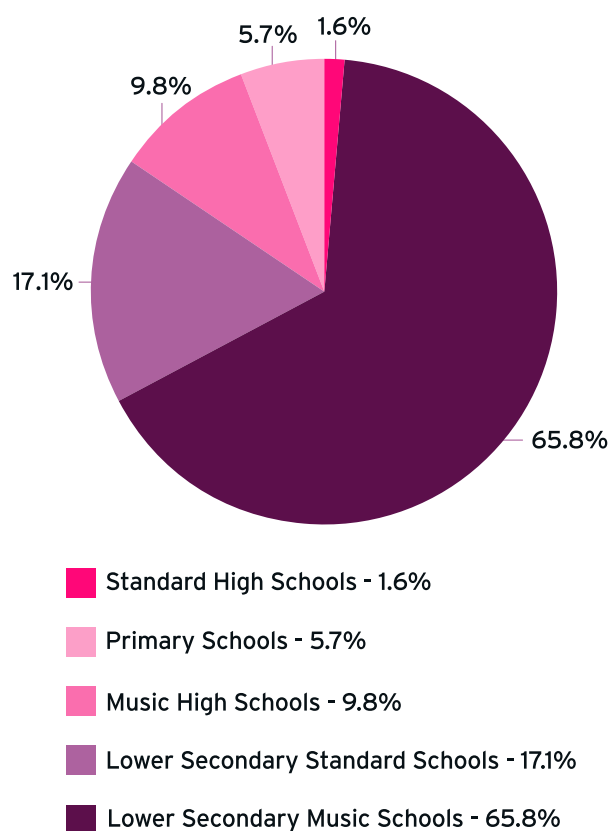◗ Music is an experience that should be lived with active, creative participation by students

Based on these principles the following project objectives were agreed:

◗ Promoting the internationalisation of schools

◗ Raising awareness of the value of international exams mapped to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

◗ Observing of the level of musical competence in schools

◗ Training of teachers and the creation of a community in which good practices could be exchanged and teaching approaches compared

The project was accompanied by a thorough research study which investigated the systemic impact of Trinity international music exams, structured teacher training programme, and educational resources on Italian public schools.

Pilot project schools

There were 123 schools involved, from across 18 Italian regions, divided into:

5.7% 1.6%
9.8%
17.1%
65.8%

■ Standard High Schools - 1.6%

■ Primary Schools - 5.7%

■ Music High Schools - 9.8%

■ Lower Secondary Standard Schools - 17.1%

■ Lower Secondary Music Schools - 65.8%

Research framework and methodology

The research question was as follows:

To what extent and in what ways do Trinity College London's international music examinations, resources and teacher support programme influence music teaching and learning in Italian schools?

The aim was to investigate the impact of the introduction of examinations on teaching and learning in public school music classes; for example, to assess whether music teaching and learning changes in response to the use of the resources offered by Trinity and, if so, to what extent and how.

Therefore, the intent was not only to measure outcomes, but also to understand processes: how teaching practices evolve, how students engage, and how schools position music within their educational vision.

The research adopted a mixed-methods impact research framework, drawing on internationally recognised theories of educational change and assessment impact.

Data were collected at different stages of the project using four main tools:

▸ interviews with school leaders

▸ questionnaires addressed to music teachers

▸ lesson observations (in presence and online)

▸ focus groups with teachers

This approach allowed the research team to explore not only what changed, but how and why change occurred, capturing teachers' beliefs, professional identities, classroom practices and students' reactions.

Despite the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the project team was able to adapt quickly and the forced transition to online environments, while challenging, became an opportunity to expand participation, strengthen digital competences and reinforce professional communities among teachers.

"In my school before Covid the IT situation was almost zero. Now in my institute everyone uses Classroom, in fact I am anxious every year to immediately get the addresses of the children to send the materials. Before, we used a lot of paper and often the kids would lose it. Now everything is in the cloud, we have direct contact with the kids and not just the parents. I can send an e-mail to the pupil and tell him "look, tomorrow there is this test, remember" and I can send him audio videos, scores. From this point of view there has been a wonderful upgrade that I continue and will continue to use because it is also a way of empowerment."

"There was a kind of mutual help. Between teachers from the same institute, but also from different institutes, we tried to help each other, and those who knew more gave suggestions to those who might have been more inexperienced, so the positive aspect concerns precisely the breaking down of certain rigidities on the part of some teachers, including myself. Luckily there was the possibility of technology because I think what we would have lost without it."
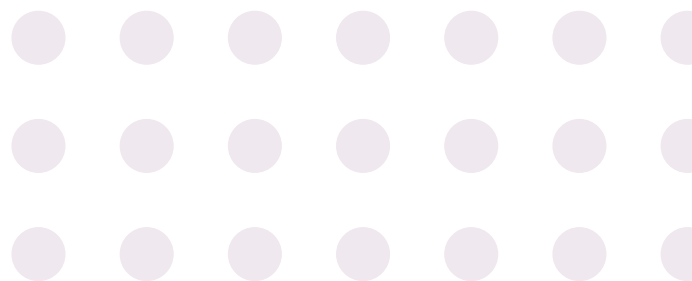
Key findings
Impact on schools and school leadership

The **102 school leaders** who were interviewed consistently reported that the introduction of Trinity international music exams enhanced the status of music within the school curriculum, positioning it as a core educational discipline rather than a marginal subject.

> "In Italy, the study of music is often a sideline discipline, instead it is good to ensure quality pathways to encourage talent, with a significant impact on student motivation."

The interviews revealed how Trinity exams supported strategic planning, enabling schools to articulate clearer objectives within their School Development Plans and self-evaluation reports.

> "The clarity in the goals to be achieved and the fact of having common objectives can give us more cohesion in the path to reach them. This can also support children with more difficulties, giving them extra motivational support."

Many school leaders emphasised the value of objective, externally validated assessment as a guarantee of quality for families and as a tool for transparency and accountability.

> "Trinity exams are a concrete, measurable, identifiable and attainable goal, so they support growth. Parents are interested in courses that include objective and externally recognised assessments."

Headteachers also highlighted strengthened institutional identity and visibility, particularly for music-oriented schools seeking to distinguish themselves within their local context.

> "We like the idea of becoming an examination centre for Trinity exams in order to show that there is a strong focus on music education in our school."

The international dimension of Trinity exams fostered alignment with European and international qualification frameworks and supported the internationalisation of schools.

> "We have been aiming for European and international scope in the choice and construction of our routes for years, and we want this to happen for music as well through Trinity exams."

Key findings
Impact on teaching practices and teacher professional development

One of the most significant outcomes of the project concerned the impact on teachers' professional growth.

What teachers have reported is impressive, especially if we consider that the vast majority of those involved in the study had over 10 years of experience in the teaching of music, and over half (50.8%) had over 20.

Years of experience teaching music

- First year - 2.2%
- From 1 to 5 - 4.4%
- From 5 to 10 - 9.4%
- From 10 to 20 - 33.1%
- More than 20 - 50.8%
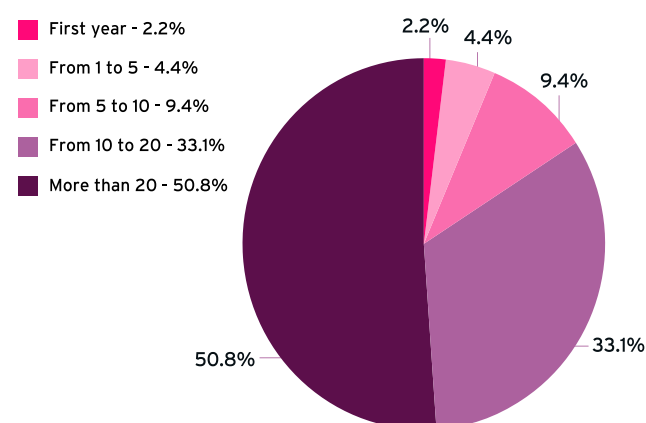
The data show a progressive shift in teaching practices towards clearer articulation of lesson objectives, including musical, pedagogical and social-emotional goals.

Teachers increasingly emphasised performance, interpretation and musical identity rather than purely technical execution.

> "We hope to push pupils towards more creative aspects than mechanical/mnemonic studies. I have seen pieces by very young composers in Trinity's texts. I would like to push them towards this kind of practice, making music in a creative way, including through their own music and emotions."

Greater use of listening, reflection and self-assessment emerged as integral components of learning, alongside stronger alignment between curriculum planning, assessment and student progression.

The structured nature of the pathways provided by Trinity exams, supported the design of progressive and inclusive learning trajectories, helping teachers recognise and value individual student differences.

Teachers reported renewed motivation, expanded repertoire choices and increased confidence in adopting contemporary and student-centred approaches.

> "Trinity was a stimulus especially for the students who wanted to participate because setting a goal is undoubtedly stimulating and empowering. Having to record in preparation for an entire performance is a growth experience in terms of awareness, concentration and focus. The structure of the exam is certainly an important experience for them and for us teachers, it was a novelty that also stimulated us in the search for new repertoires and new approaches, which is useful in changing the habits of our school a bit, which is also one of our tasks."

The teacher training programme associated with the project was perceived as enabling rather than prescriptive.

> "Having a scheme, a program, something set in my opinion does not cage. On the contrary, it gives a certain discipline, a certain rigor and goals, those are the pieces. I consider it more orderly and the students feel it. I think Trinity exams and their syllabus really represent a place and a moment of order."

It respected teachers' professional autonomy while offering shared reference points, practical tools and opportunities for dialogue and exchange of best practice.

> "In joining the Pilot Project, we are looking for opportunities for us teachers to grow, because you can never be up-to-date enough. The distance learning workshops offered by Trinity got me involved and convinced me. As a result, the opportunity that the Pilot Project gives us as teachers also benefits our pupils. Trinity's learning paths help us to standardise between different teachers and to work better together. We are a united and creative group in composite performances (readings and music) involving orchestra and soloists. We want to be able to be one soul, the exams help us in this."

Key findings
Impact on student engagement and learning

Across all school levels, students demonstrated increased motivation and commitment, supported by clear, achievable milestones.

Students developed greater awareness of their own progress and learning strategies, improved confidence in performance contexts and stronger ability to manage emotions and performance anxiety.

Music learning also supported the development of social and collaborative skills, particularly through ensemble work and shared musical goals.

The graded structure of Trinity exams enabled personalised learning pathways, making music education more inclusive and accessible.

Students with special educational needs were able to participate fully thanks to adapted assessment conditions, reinforcing the principle that Trinity exams should be an opportunity for expression rather than exclusion.

Students' testimonies highlighted music as a space for identity, belonging and self-expression, reinforcing its role in wellbeing and personal development.

"Trinity exams offer a pathway that always stimulates you to give your best and to go beyond your limits."

"Seeing myself assessed in the presence of an examiner on different aspects helped me. I also took the digital exam, experiencing a different kind of relationship: you don't have the examiner in front of you, but while you are playing you know that someone will view and thoroughly evaluate your material. Making the exam video was not difficult because I had a very ready reference figure, my teacher, who was a huge help to me."

"Preparing for the exam was an interesting and useful experience, I had the opportunity to study pieces in Italian, but also in English, improving my command of the language."

"In the future, I would like to attend the Conservatoire and become a professional."

"I found the Trinity repertoires very much in line with those required for the Conservatoire entrance exam: the exam programmes offer a good combination of ancient, classical and modern repertoire."

"I was able to achieve personal success and it was a completely positive experience. I am anxious and emotional, but during the exam, as soon as I started playing, I relied on my abilities and everything went well: the preparation required for the exam leads to more awareness of one's performance."

Music, assessment and educational equity

A central theme emerging from the research is the relationship between assessment and educational equity. The project demonstrated that well-designed assessment does not constrain creativity, but supports meaningful learning.

Assessment provided structure without standardising learners and helped students and teachers make progress visible and valued.

> "In the past I proposed Trinity exams to the most deserving students, this year I reason in terms of opportunities and propose them to everyone. The objectives are accessible to everyone, because there is gradualness, so the formula is inclusive. If someone already knows how to play well, he starts from where he is and doesn't have to repeat courses."

> "The clarity in the goals to be achieved and the fact of having common goals can give us more cohesion in the path to reach them. This can also support children with more difficulties, giving them extra motivational support."

The mapping of Trinity music exams to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) enhanced their educational legitimacy and opened new perspectives for students' academic and professional futures.

Teachers and school leaders expressed interest in broader recognition of music exams within higher education and vocational pathways, similar to what already exists for English language.

> "I hope that the culture of external exams will become part of the normality of the students at my institute, because Trinity offer the possibility of taking an exam that can be spent on the student's curriculum and also with a view to further studies."

Systemic implications and added value

Beyond individual schools, the project offers insights relevant to the wider education system.

Music education benefits from vertical continuity, from early childhood to upper secondary education.

Teacher communities and shared practices emerged as essential drivers of sustainable innovation.

The project confirms the value of partnerships between public institutions and international educational charities in supporting evidence-based policy development.

Music also proved to be a powerful context for developing 21st-century skills, including creativity, collaboration, communication and critical thinking.

The findings reinforce the idea that innovation in education is a process rather than a single event, requiring time, support, trust and a shared vision.

Way forward: Building a sustainable future for music in schools

The research points towards a clear way forward which includes the following steps:

▸ strengthening alliances between schools, educational authorities and international partners

▸ investing in continuous teacher professional development

▸ embedding music more firmly within whole-school educational strategies

▸ promoting a culture of assessment that values growth, diversity and creativity

As articulated by Professor Luigi Berlinguer, whose vision inspired this work, music education, when supported by coherent policy frameworks, international standards and sustained professional development, contributes directly to educational quality, social cohesion and the formation of active, creative and resilient citizens.

This project demonstrates that such a vision is not only desirable, but achievable and that music education represents a strategic investment for policy makers and governments.

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