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Career challenges: an exploration into potential barriers faced by Scottish emerging composers

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Abstract

This article explores the potential barriers for emerging composers to constructing and maintaining a career in the field of composition in Scotland, viewed through the lens of both those early in their careers and the experience of others who have worked professionally for many years. Thirty-nine composers responded to a survey that highlighted the role of educational mentoring, the need for monetary stability and the challenges faced by female and older emerging composers. The professional lives of current Scottish composers have been seldom studied, and the purpose of this investigation is to explore, inform and provide suggestions for future consideration.

Keywords: Emerging; composer; mentoring; funding; female

Introduction

Starting a career as a composer may be challenging and requires motivation, passion for one's craft, knowledge, skill and resilience. Kirnarskaya (2009) states that the composer perceives themselves to be a music creator from youth and sometimes earlier, yet the process of how they develop their skills remains an underresearched area. Certainly the role of the teacher is crucial in the early stages contributing towards a dyadic relationship between the educator and the learner 'working towards shared goals in a process characterised by collaboration, joint effort, and social support' (Barrett, 2006, p. 195). However several myths exist within composition education, such as the debate around the presence of an innate talent and the need to 'learn the rules of composing before becoming creative' (Devaney, DEVANAY, 2022, p. 3). Additionally the lack of experience by some music teachers in teaching composition outside the examination system, termed 'examination composing' (Savage & Fautley, 2011, p. 149), can be disadvantageous to the pedagogical process and a barrier to progress (Francis, 2012).

Socio-economic factors that affect educational outcomes can impact development as a composer. Research indicates that parental support and encouragement, alongside a motivational school learning environment where teachers and peers are significant contributors to the creative process provide important opportunities to develop (Duarte & Constantinidi, 2021). Menard (2015 p. 114) highlights the key benefits to students of learning composition in secondary schools as 'enjoyment, improved musical understanding, personal expression, increased interest in music, and understanding composition process'. Undoubtedly the impact of high-quality teaching and teacher training is crucial, as highlighted by the Scottish composer, Sir James MacMillan (2021), who advocates the development of teacher skills through the exploration of their own compositional knowledge and techniques in order to maximise the creative potential of their students.

Assistance is necessary to all those beginning their trade and the benefits of having a mentor are well known. Kram (1983, p. 608) describes it as having the ability to 'significantly enhance development in early adulthood and also in the mid-career stage of the more experienced individual'. Mentoring is seen as a dyadic journey between a more experienced person (mentor) and someone with less experience (mentee) and is often regarded as the route towards professionalism (Grenfell, 2018). This is exemplified in the Scottish Young Composers' Project (2019–2020), an initiative by the University of Glasgow that supported music composition skills through mentoring for students in secondary schools. Hays (2013) highlights that the most successful musicians have usually had a mentor at some point in their lives who had assisted them through support, encouragement and as a role model. Interestingly the term 'successful' does not always equate to financial stability or employment position but rather to personal happiness and satisfaction.

Studies show that financial constraints through poor funding can have a negative effect on career progression both in and out of the school environment, with educational bodies often falling short of delivering diversity in music education provision by focusing on localised areas and specific demographics (Henley & Barton, 2022; Dufour & Griffiths, 2019). Few composers are able to make a living from the profession and develop 'portfolio careers' (Smith & Thwaites, 2019). The majority carry out work in other fields, some music related, especially in education and performance. The Independent Society of Musicians (ISM, 2016) found that a fifth of composers identified education work as the most important additional source of income. This highlights the need for engagement with other musical sectors and to a portfolio career, combining composition with other musical or non-musical outlets.

An important survey of acclaimed composers carried out by the Ivors Academy (2022) revealed that a third felt that the composer career had become more challenging, but they would still pursue a future in the profession if beginning again. The survey reported that the 'portfolio career' was commonplace and the need for additional support and opportunities for those starting out as composers in mid to later life were pressing. Interestingly most composers surveyed had received musical tuition whilst at school and had benefitted from opportunities to perform music when younger. This implies that lifelong support is the key to nurturing a healthy creative output.

Gender plays a role in determining successful outcomes for a career composer. Leslie et al. (2015) highlight that in U.S. higher education institutions only 16% of doctorates in music composition were awarded to women in 2011, and only 15% of composition faculty positions were held by women in 2014 (O'Bannon, 2014). Bennett et al. (2019) reported from a survey of 225 female composers in the western music culture, which explored the disproportionately low representation of music by women in higher education programmes and their lack of preparation for a future career in music. Additionally the notion of self-promotion in a male-dominated profession is not without its challenges; Scharff (2015, p. 97) highlights a reluctance by many female musicians to pursue this course due to the perception of being 'products that have to be sold'.

One means of revitalizing the creative talents of female composers is to commission new works (Strempel, 2006) with colleges and universities shifting their previous positions and assuming the role of patrons. Strempel suggests this would be 'a powerful gesture, an act of faith and support that encourages the creative life of the composer' (para.6). There are some positive moves however to rebalance the gender representation as demonstrated by the BBC who announced in 2017 that it would 'introduce gender balancing to its programme, pledging that half of all new commissions will go to women by 2022' (Singh, 2018). As a result the BBC exceeded its target at the 2023 Proms season with two-thirds of all commissions being given to female composers (ISM, 2023).

Major studies have engaged in targeting specific career questions on national and international scales such as the Composer Commissioning Survey Report (2015) and the Independent Society of Musicians' study (2016). A more recent investigation considers how emerging composers 'make sense of their work within a climate of competition' (Smith & Thwaites 2019, p. 595). It is worth noting that the word 'emerging' frequently refers to a composer who is not fully established, young

in age, and is in need of further support. There is ongoing discussion around this term, especially as some individuals start their compositional career paths later in life. Rudman (2023) advocates that arts organisations should address the needs of those who have reduced opportunities, and ‘explicitly define their eligibility criteria based on their target beneficiaries’. This way they increase their equitable and inclusive footprint and avoid nebulous terminology such as ‘emerging’. Defining the term ‘emerging’ as one who is an early career practitioner, this study is the first of its kind to explore career decisions and subsequent barriers to an emerging compositional career in classical and contemporary music within Scotland.

Research design

From an ontological perspective this research took a constructivist approach, relying on the participants’ perceptions and social construction of their reality. As the epistemological stance taken was one of interpretivism, which acknowledges that the data gathered will be subjective, the chosen methodology was qualitative. This aligned itself to the research question, aims and context of the study, which considered the views of a broad range of experiences, from early to later career composers. Data were gathered a year after the second Covid lockdown period, and it is acknowledged this may have had an impact on the findings, although this was not directly explored.

Methodology

Respondents completed a self-reporting online survey on Microsoft Forms containing fifteen questions: three numerical questions to determine the demographic and twelve qualitative open-ended questions which invited personal perspectives on three key aspects: rationale/decision to choose a career in composition, financial implications and opportunities/barriers encountered whilst working as a composer.

Convenience sampling was utilised, reaching out to contemporary music organisations, composition staff at higher education institutes and the researcher’s professional contacts, alongside promotion through social media targeting composers of classical and contemporary (new) music. The initial call out period was two weeks, but due to the small uptake in numbers this was extended on two occasions by a week. Ultimately thirty-nine ($n = 39$) composers responded to the survey, and in completing the questions respondents automatically gave their consent to participation and to the reporting and publication of results. As the survey was completed namelessly, participant confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed. Initial thoughts had been to focus on the perspectives of emerging composers with two to ten years in the profession, however on reflection it was decided that the backgrounds and life stories of composers who had gained more experience would provide valuable perspectives. Ethical approval was sought and granted from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

Participation criteria were to be either domiciled and working in Scotland or to have begun a composition career in Scottish and subsequently moved elsewhere. An iterative process consisting of six steps was utilised to identify, evaluate and report the qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Analyzing the results using an inductive thematic approach allowed the data to determine the key themes. All participant quotes are presented in inverted commas and italics.

The first question revealed that eight of the participants had left tertiary education within the last two to four years, eight within five to seven years, twelve within eight to ten years and eleven at least ten years previously. Of these, fifteen had worked as composers either full or part-time for up to five years, twelve had been involved in composition between six and ten years and eleven participants had worked in the profession for ten years or more. One respondent omitted the question. The importance of these initial enquiries was to determine the amount of experience within the participant grouping.

Gender identification was also included to gain further information of the group, given that composition has historically been regarded as a male dominated profession within the western tradition (Bennett et al., 2019). Twelve respondents identified as female, twenty one as male and six as other. Given that 51% of Scotland's population identifies as female and yet only 7.7% of scheduled works currently in global orchestras are composed by women (Donne Equality & Diversity in Global Repertoire, 2022), it was encouraging to see that just over 30% of the participants in this survey were female.

Findings

Thematic categories are presented alongside representative quotations, which reflect the underlying themes emanating from the respondents' narratives. These areas reveal personal perspectives of the participants' relationship with their profession and are discussed under six key themes: choices, composer identity, financial implications, career opportunities, career barriers and recommendations for future consideration.

Choices

The decision to become a composer was evidently a highly personal choice and occurred at a wide range of times within the participants' lives from primary school through to middle age. The majority however appear to have made the choice during their secondary schooling and tertiary education years.

'I knew it was what I was most interested in during high school.'

'... as a mature BMus student after a teaching career (15 yrs) and self-employment (10 yrs).'

For some, commissioned opportunities and encounters with others informed their decision to compose.

'A conversation with an established and well-respected Scottish composer about my interest in music in film. I was told to 'forget the risks and jump in'. I was around 25 years old at the time.'

Creative regulation through composition appeared to centre around the fundamental need to be innovative. Several participants indicated the creative draw was so intense that the career path was firmly set. As one composer stated, 'I was cursed – had to do it – resistance was futile'. Giving a meaning to life and 'forging a career around something' which was 'loved so passionately' further enhance this argument. Some participants indicated their strong desire to leave a legacy by contributing to something which would 'escape into' the world. For others the career intentions were more tenuous resulting in a negotiation between various musical pathways, such as performance. One revealed that composing came to the fore after a battle with performance anxiety and finding that composition provided a creative outlet which could be engaged with in their own time, thereby spreading out the pressure.

Composer identity

The participants collectively expressed multiple ways in which they identified with the term 'composer'. One commented that 'I am a composer. Everything else is secondary or supportive to that'. Several others utilised the term 'artist' to describe their identity and wanted to ensure that this was something to be considered. They put forward a variety of thoughts with one stating that

despite being employed as a teacher by the local city council they still considered their ‘occupation to be that of musician artist’. Another respondent hoped to be considered as a composer and an artist, highlighting the need for a clearer distinction between the two terms.

‘I’m a musician. Composing is a big part of that, but it’s a part of who I am (as an artist), not the whole.’

The philosophy of identity focuses on the uniqueness of the individual, attributing them to certain roles and questioning ‘who am I and what do I want to be?’ (Sollberger, 2013, p. 29). Certainly to identify as a composer, a willingness to collaborate with others is essential as music provides ‘a means by which people can share emotions, intentions and meanings’ (MacDonald, Hargreaves, & Miell, 2017, p. 1). One participant questioned the philosophical background to their identity as:

‘Maybe, composition is both art (inspiration) and craft (hard work), and you need to be able to do both . . . or finding nice people to work with.’

The study revealed a potential conflict of interests between some composers’ perceptions of what they regarded as their main occupation philosophically and in reality. One respondent stated:

‘I find there is a real tension between what people understand of the job of ‘composer’ and its reality. I am somewhat torn because in many ways composition is a kind of glorified hobby for me . . . I feel there is no job of composer for the vast majority.’

A further description of a composer’s identity is the joining together of ‘a complex web of activities’, underlining how being a composer often entails having a portfolio of skills. Many respondents listed other musical outlets as part of their main occupation, and this was clearly highlighted in the following comments:

‘I think of myself just as a freelance musician. Bits of composing, bits of teaching, bits of gigs.’

‘I am a composer, educator, musician, and facilitator, working with people at all stages in life.’

Identity is frequently defined as an individual’s sense of self, rooted in both the workplace and in personal life leading to multiple identities. It is of critical importance in describing who we are, and often a career identity can be highly significant when a person devotes so much time to working (Walsh & Gordon, 2008).

Financial implications

Having personal financial stability is extremely important as it provides *a sense of security and peace of mind*. Absence of monetary worries increases personal feelings of health and wellbeing and often alleviates anxiety and stress (Benzeval et al., 2014). Of the 39 participants only 4 stated that composition provided their main source of income. In response to the question: Do you consider being a composer to be your main occupation?’ one representative respondent stated ‘Philosophically, yes. Financially, no.’ A small handful of others indicated that it provided just under half of their income or less highlighting the precarious nature of life as a professional composer.

‘I have previously been a freelance composer, but it’s very hard to earn a stable income that way.’

‘Sadly I have made hardly anything out of composition.’

‘I think that the most I’ve earned from any one composing job is about £75+VAT!’

Most composers were keen to stress that their main profession lay in other areas from composition, mainly within the music profession. As one respondent indicated ‘I don’t have enough paid commissions to work as a composer, so I have to do other things to make a living’. Teaching was the most frequently cited occupational source, particularly lecturing in higher education settings and offering private instrumental tuition.

‘The income from composition is so unreliable I tend to rely on my teaching income month to month.’

‘Most of my income is through teaching. Mainly private piano tuition along with local music service work in schools leading and coaching after school music.’

Some participants stated that they taught composition, so were able to draw an income from a creative genre and facilitate engagement in the compositional world, albeit from an educator perspective. Teaching composition was deemed to be distinctly different to being a composer, and this suggests a separate identity as teacher-composer. In response to why another occupation was necessary one composer wrote:

‘It is difficult, sometimes impossible, to sustain a consistent level of paid work associated with composition. . . . I am dependent on commission fees for the vast majority of my income as a composer. Therefore when others do not take the initiative to commission me, I will not have enough money to live on . . . I was fortunate that teaching composition aligned well with my skill set and paid well enough.’

Career opportunities

Participants were asked to comment on any significant moments that had occurred, which shaped their careers as composers, alongside missed opportunities. These broadly fell into three main categories: study, support, and funding.

1. Study

The vast majority had trained in composition via a tertiary education route, although one stated that they described themselves as an amateur, despite having extensive ‘knowledge of the area’. Having the opportunity to study composition at school and in tertiary education, in several examples to PhD level, was deemed to be an important factor in shaping a career. Participants outlined the gradual process of moving through educational programmes and fulfilling ambitions of studying composition in leading institutions:

‘My PhD gave me opportunities for exposure that I would otherwise not have had.’

‘Studying composition as an undergraduate at (institution). It opened up my understanding and knowledge.’

Clearly higher education institutions facilitated intense focus on this form of creative output as a specialism and provided opportunities to engage with experts and gain their support.

Six of the respondents indicated regret at missing out on certain educational opportunities in composition either because they were not offered or due to a lack of finance or availability. One stated that ‘I had my first “proper composition lesson” when I was about 23, at university. I would have loved to have had one at age 15 or 16’ and another regretted not attending music college as they constantly felt they ‘could never catch up with people who had done the prestigious route’. Missed chances to learn specific new techniques such as microtonal skills and free composition were also cited through fear of accruing student debt or through lack of availability on tertiary education programmes.

2. Support

Over and above tertiary education other openings for interaction with well-known composers and fellow musicians were deemed to be positive experiences. Careers were enhanced by others who provided opportunities for collaboration and offered support which boosted confidence levels.

‘Professional encouragement from musicians who have wanted to perform my music and have provided invaluable feedback.’

‘From the initial conversations with an established and well-respected Scottish composer to the individual projects I have been lucky enough to work on and everything in between has shaped my composing career.’

The often solitary nature of composition was highlighted and personal interaction facilitated discourse and the broadening of ideas and thinking. One female respondent indicated the benefits of joining a professional society: ‘Joining the Society of Women Organists has also been a great support in negotiating a very gender-unbalanced arena’. Societies such as this offer support to women organists, promoting their activities and aiming to recruit women of all demographics to learn the organ. It is no secret that for many decades women have been underrepresented in the world of music, including composition, and therefore not surprising that the topic arose. Another female respondent indicated that she had grown up ‘in an atmosphere where it was not thought possible for women to be composers . . . thus (she) missed a great deal as for some bizarre reason (she) didn’t question this till much later’.

The influence of families impacted a few of the composers’ opportunities negatively as demonstrated in the following example comment:

‘I wish I hadn’t listened to my parents and pursued music as my main focus in university instead of spending all that time and energy studying Physics to make my family happy. I wish I hadn’t worked as a computer programmer after university to make money, but instead worked as a composer’s apprentice/assistant. Factors influencing my decision-making at the time were my family and peers and teachers. People didn’t even seem to think writing music was a serious option for me.’

The participant continued by questioning whether it was due to a lack of talent or down to the fact that she is a female. This is something that can never be known but one thing she felt certain of was that most artists of standing all had the support of an experienced other at some point in their careers.

In addition to engagement with other individuals the idea of financial support was well documented by the participants.

3. Funding

A professional life needs funding and with only a select few of the participants existing on composition alone this topic was a key area for comment. Winning competitions such as the Scottish Award for New Music opened multiple doors for one composer, who confessed that 'without it, I wouldn't have got to the point I am now'. Being asked to participate in projects also helped with self-esteem and provided challenges to experiment with new ideas.

Commissions and awards from funding bodies were regularly cited as key interventions that helped shape careers. The idea of confidence was reiterated in connection with emerging composer schemes, which provide a significant element of platform/exposure. Artist funding and financial support from leading musical organisations such as Red Note Ensemble, Scottish Opera, the BBC, and Edinburgh International Festival all opened new ways of working and offered new resources. Having been the recipient of some major funding opportunities as an emerging composer, one participant reflected on the impact of this on their career:

'In some ways this has shaped the kinds of pieces I have written and the way I am perceived by the outside world. I'm not sure to what extent any of these were my decision, or the result of anything I did in particular. There was a lot of luck involved in the early stages, and less in recent years.'

A lack of confidence appeared to be an issue amongst several of the participants in promoting their music and creating funding opportunities. One expressed a sense of rejection when unsuccessfully applying for composition opportunities. Others revealed a lack of confidence in promoting their music, which led to the inability to make their own opportunities. This highlights the need to have multiple skills, which could include promotional and business acumen, IT and recording skills, alongside the more obvious musical ability and knowledge.

'I wish I'd had more self belief in my earlier career; to have sufficient confidence in my own writing ability, create my own group, hopefully made up of like-minded musicians who I could feel comfortable to record, release & perform more of my own work.'

Artist in residence schemes for emerging composers give artists the opportunity to envelope themselves in their work away from outside distractions and increase their knowledge of different approaches often through collaboration with others. One composer stated:

'Having the opportunity to immerse myself in the workings of an opera house as Glyndebourne's Young Composer-in-Residence (date). This thoroughly cemented my interest in opera and enabled me to get a great number of performed works under my belt.'

Another cited council-based funding as a source of income, which encouraged the promotion of their work. This would suggest that residencies for emerging composers can have a major, often long-term impact on career development and prospects.

Career barriers

A significant number of composers felt that they had faced challenges in developing their careers. Interestingly there was some discourse on the meaning of the term 'emerging' and its links to the word 'young'. One composer commented that 'young' had almost disappeared however the attitude is still in evidence. As a result there appeared a sense of 'why should we invest in someone that "only" has twenty more years of composing left in them, when we could invest in a

composer in their twenties that has 50–60 years of composing left in them?’. This is an important finding as there are emerging composers in older age groups who are taking composition as a second career.

The issue of gender plays a role in creating barriers when women are omitted from selection in favour of male composers. Gender bias was deemed to be an issue, with one female participant stating that she had been ‘left out of selection so many times in favour of male composers’. Another suggesting that she was not ‘taken seriously as an older woman’.

There are issues too for disabled artists who face many challenges:

‘I’ve had to kind of barge my way into everything and then fight for my right to be there . . . I do want to try to open doors for women and disabled people though because we can’t expect them to fight like that every time.’

Several composers challenged the term ‘talent’ which is often used in connection with opportunities for commissions and funding (PRS, 2023). One stated that talent is something that must be nurtured rather than simply recognised. Another suggested that it is a problematic term as it encourages composers to feel that they continually must win favour, rather than realising that composing is actually their work. As highlighted by Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (2014) talent is a multifaceted relationship between opportunities, skills and the ability to act on these.

Future consideration

In reflecting on career challenges and experiences the respondents were asked to suggest courses of action, which could be taken to support emerging composers. Four major themes became apparent: connection opportunities, finance, educational mentoring and marginal groups.

1. Connection opportunities

The need for more support in acquiring the necessary skills for self-promotion to make vital connections was highlighted. It was felt by some that assistance in developing transferable skills with a focus on administration such as IT, making funding applications, building networks and updating websites would be of enormous benefit.

‘I think ways of helping to get into local musical networks is the big one. How to meet people? Who to talk to? Mailing lists, facebook groups etcetera . . . If you need to do some self-promotion, what are the best channels for doing this in a way that is useful and reaches the right people?’

Making connections with fellow composers and musicians would improve the supportive infrastructure within Scotland, which was deemed to be lacking. This could extend to further awareness, support and advocacy from local councils and event promoters. Comparison was made with the promotion of Irish composers by the Irish national broadcaster RTE which ‘really puts the situation here into perspective.’ This highlights the need to encourage more opportunities for performance and awareness.

‘Probably the biggest thing for emerging and student composers to be aware of is the importance of fostering of long-term relationships/friendships with performers and organisers.’

In more general terms, the research sample expressed a wish for ‘more commissioned work for all composers, from the larger organisations in Scotland and around the UK’. Additionally,

commissioned works that have already been performed could be shared with other organisations within the creation of a 'vetted repository of works'. This would lead to repeated opportunities for existing works to be heard.

Some participants suggested the benefits of attending rehearsals to watch, listen and learn from others and the creation of a Scottish arts' pass, which would allow for free access to such schemes. Facilitating these free music-making communities and improved networking connections would enhance feelings of safety and support and help to break down barriers.

'Some way of more easily making connections with the local scene like some kind of meet-up event or call. Platforms to do very small things, like putting on a small piece as part of an informal concert. Stuff like this is very helpful ...'

Having opportunities such as these were thought to increase resilience and help with building a more successful and sustainable career as an emerging composer.

2. Finance

Insufficient funding was identified as a major issue, which would need to be significantly addressed to assist in sustaining a career in composition. Due to the relative impossibility in making a living solely from composing suggestions were made for a basic income or artist living wage. One participant proposed an extensive rebuilding of the Scottish classical music sector to offer 'integrated support for music makers across Scotland with direct funding from the Scottish Government'.

The need to cease competitions that require complete pieces for entry was proposed. Given the length of time taken to compose a work and the resultant loss of income it was recommended that entrants should submit proposals and portfolios with the winner alone being asked to compose a work, with the reward of a performance and/or recording. Linked to this was the idea that grants should support periods of development work without any undue pressures.

A call for orchestras and ensembles to offer an 'adopt a music creator' would facilitate a creative journey for a successful applicant and assist in the fostering of networking, collaboration and funding. Whilst composers can apply for a variety of funding programmes to help underpin their activities and advance their careers these opportunities are often short term, and one respondent suggested the implementation of easy to access commissions and project funding with longer term career grants. On a more practical level, 'affordable' studio space and accommodation were raised as a recommendation with the emphasis on 'affordable'.

3. Mentoring

Mentoring *schemes* help to share the wealth of experience and knowledge within the composition sector, and this was regarded by some as an important proposition for emerging composers. Having educational mentorship support helps in taking next steps based on experience and knowledge.

'I like the opportunities where you are given a production budget and some mentoring to then do what you want. I think this can be valuable if done right as it fosters a more independent approach.'

Mentoring, especially for female composers, was cited as an important factor, particularly at the current time when progress and awareness are heightened regarding sexism and gender inequality. Having professional educational guidance would be highly valuable 'until things

balance out and we see just as many female composers nominated for awards as we do male composers’.

4. Marginal groups

Marginal groups lent their voices to the survey, in particular female and older emerging composers. The female respondents recommended a significant, united effort by Scotland’s professional ensembles to secure a greater representation of women composers and that this must be consistent. Female-friendly environments and additional access to opportunities for engagement across disciplines in highly supportive atmospheres is much needed. It is important that scenarios as indicated by one participant should be questioned and answered:

‘I grew up in an atmosphere where it was not thought possible for women to be composers . . . thus I missed a great deal.’

Thoughts were posited on an enhanced realisation that the word ‘emerging’ might not necessarily apply to someone over fifty years of age and an acknowledgement that a composer can ‘emerge’ much later than in their early twenties.

‘Opportunities (are needed) specifically for older emerging composers, or people doing composing as a second career, over the age of 45 - 50; with a minimum age limit, rather than a maximum age limit. A match-making service that brings together performers and composers with similar outlooks and philosophies and politics to help foster long-term symbiotic relationships and which guaranteed performance opportunities for them.’

Conclusion

Overall the data pointed to two vital aspects that are intrinsically linked when thinking about the barriers faced by Scottish emerging composers today. Firstly, that more connection with, and support from experienced others is needed to raise awareness of issues, and to assist in making significant forward moves in compositional careers. As demonstrated by Hays (2013), mentoring is a vital component in developing a professional career. Impartial safe spaces where the sharing of ideas, perspectives and experience alongside professional support which address the many barriers faced in the industry would be welcomed. Reassessing the teaching of composition in schools, not only to train but to prepare young composers for careers in this field would be beneficial through mentoring schemes in which ‘teachers and students cultivate greater confidence in their composition skills and develop identities as composers through the collaborative mentorship process’ (Menard, 2024, p. 487).

Further in-depth analysis of the role of education systems, not only in Scotland but throughout the UK would enhance our knowledge of composition learning in both school and higher education contexts. As reported by Randles, Kratus, and Burnard (2012) composition learning has historically been considered secondary to performance in global music education curricula. It is vital to continue the conversations around connections between classroom compositional activities and the practices of professional composers to further inform how composition is taught, in order to motivate, engage, educate and prepare the composers of the future (Evans & Spruce, 2022).

Training schemes in transferable skills to improve self-promotion techniques are recommended and these would improve openings for networking and making connections. Emerging composer schemes that provide support and development opportunities to those in the early years of a professional career would help to realise potential, empowering composers to

manage their careers rather than relying on situations that are beyond their control. Certainly having an enhanced toolkit of skills would facilitate a stronger composer identity on how emerging composers regard themselves in society (Sollberger, 2013).

Secondly funding and financial stability are major issues in developing a career as a composer and those intending on pursuing a future in the profession must be equipped with full knowledge of the barriers that potentially lie ahead. As shown in the ISM (2016) report, other sources of income are essential to the maintenance of financial stability through a portfolio of skills. These skills include education, which must be viewed as a valuable skill in its own right and not purely as a means to increase finances. Hence the reconceptualisation of the established image of the music teacher is essential (Purves et al., 2004).

It is clear from this study that organisations such as orchestras, ensembles, councils and the Scottish government, need to reflect on current funding opportunities and offer more in the way of long-term grants, performance opportunities and reliable sources of income. Methods of selection need to be addressed as frequently it is down to external factors such as location, and, at times, luck. The picture of the daily financial challenges in a composer's professional life needs to be explored in more detail and with more empathy along with frank discussion around further assistance to marginal groups such as female and older emerging composers. Given that six men are signed to UK music publishers for every one female (Bain, 2019) it is essential to increase the number of commissions for female composers to eradicate the prevalent marginalisation of this demographic (Strempe, 2006).

Despite the constructive nature of the recommendations, sadly many of the comments given by the sample set in the survey were negative and pessimistic in nature. There was an overall feeling of bleakness in the future of composers' careers particularly rooted in the direction of arts funding and fragility around the place for new music. The concept of 'emerging' was at times challenged and regarded as amorphous in meaning.

The focus of this study was to explore, inform and address potential issues faced by Scottish emerging composers and make recommendations. One limitation of this study is that it does not dissect the different types of music within the participant grouping and this would have assisted in compartmentalising exactly where specific problems might lie within the industry. Future studies could gather responses from specific compositional genres and compare more phenomenological and intersubjective approaches to the interpretation of results. Extending the discourse on gender would be beneficial to include non-conforming composers, and also to consider a future where the term 'women composers' becomes subsumed and normalised under the overall banner of 'composer'. Other areas for consideration could include potential barriers encountered by composers in different ethnic groupings, and more dissection of the role of socio-economic status.

It is hoped that the suggestions offered by the participants in this study will serve as a start to future dialogue in addressing barriers to career development for emerging composers, both in Scotland and further afield.

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