In 2014, Sound and Music conducted the Composer Commissioning Survey for the first time. We had an overwhelming response and saw press coverage across the world. This year we have improved the questions based upon the feedback we received and we have taken a more statistically rigorous approach to the processing of the data. We’ve added additional questions this year in order to get a more accurate picture. This report explores the current themes within the commissioning landscape and provides a voice for composers to share their experiences.

The issue of commissioning is still a prominent area of discussion and we wanted to see what had changed for composers, if anything in the year that had passed since we last asked. This year we teamed up with the Australian Music Centre to gain a more global perspective of the issue.

The Sound and Music survey received 291 responses and the Australian Music Centre survey received 165, both following the same question structure. This report analyses the responses from both surveys, reflecting upon their differences and similarities, as well as comparing to data collected from last year’s survey where possible. Both surveys attracted international responses so the abbreviations of the surveys into UK for the Sound and Music survey and AUS for the Australian Music Centre refer to whether the surveys were based, not necessarily the respondents.

To create an accurate understanding of the data, we’ve taken steps within our analysis to remove outliers from the data and focus on the concentrated cluster of results unless stated within the report. We have done so by calculating and removing any data points that are more than 3 standard deviations from the mean.

Thank you to everyone who took part and shared their experiences with us.

Sections summary
1// Report headlines
2// About the respondents
3// What has changed since last year
4// Earnings
5// Fees
6// Outlook
7// The making of this report

Download the data
The data is also available (minus any personally identifiable details) to download and use under a Creative Commons Attributions Share-Alike license at: datahub.io/dataset/composer-commissioning-survey-2015
1 // Report headlines

This report offers an insight into the current state of commissioning for composers and highlights key areas that prompt further discussion.

The average commission fee from the UK respondents was £918
Last year this figure was £1,392. The new figure takes into account a clearer question format as well as deeper statistical analysis; also, it is unlikely that exactly the same people completed the survey as last year. Therefore whilst not directly comparable to last year, therefore, the new figure is still incredibly low. In the Australian survey, the figure was lower still at $1581.30 (£731). Read more >>

This is a lot less than composers think is fair.
We asked respondents what they considered to be a fair fee for different types and scales of work, and this was consistently more than what they are actually being paid on average for different types of work. For example, on average, composers thought a fair fee for 10 minute piece for a soloist was £1,478 from the UK respondents and $2,802 from the AUS respondents. Read more >>

Things haven’t changed a lot since last year.
The keys facts remain the same:

• Commissions are not a significant income source for a lot of composers.
• Composers are still not getting paid for some commissions and very few feel they are compensated correctly.

There is not enough time.
Time was a recurrent theme in the analysis of the data and this has come through even more strongly this year. Time is listed as one of the big reasons why respondents turn down commissions; and, as last year, there is a strong level of agreement that there is less rehearsal time for new works than there used to be. It appears that commissioners do not always understand or allow for the time necessary for a composer to make a work, nor the time needed to prepare and rehearse it for its first performance.

Responses from the survey suggest that commissions are less lucrative for AUS respondents
AUS respondents stated they earned less from commissions in comparison to UK respondents and when asked to recommend the fees for a number of commissioning scenarios, AUS respondents suggested lower fees than UK respondents for every single scenario. This indicates that Australian based commissioners place less value on composers, which is also echoed in some of the comments received. Read more >>

Fewer commissions and lower earnings, again.
When asked to compare the last three years the majority of respondents thought that this year is the worst in terms of the number of and earnings from commissions. Read more >>
We had over 470 respondents to this year’s survey. In this report we refer to the two surveys as UK and AUS, for ease and based upon their inception location but in actuality the responses came from much further afield.

Where did the respondents come from?

- 227 from the UK
- 165 from Australia
- 25 from elsewhere in Europe
- 45 from outside Europe.

What stage are they at in their career?

[Graph showing distribution of career stages for UK and AUS respondents]
2. About the respondents

Who is publishing them?

- I manage my commissions
- I have a manager/agent
- My publisher manages my commissions

How much did they earn

- £0/$0
- £5/$10k
- £10/$20k
- £15/$30k
- £20/$40k
- £20/$40k

Commissioning Survey Report 2015
What type of music were they composing?

AUS

UK
Respondents were asked to compare how many commissions they had undertaken, and how much they had earned from commissions for both 2014 and the year before (noted as ‘Past’ in the charts below) and both 2015 and the year before (noted as ‘Present’ below).

When viewing how the number of commissions undertaken by composers has changed, there is a level of stability for a large number of composers (as the number of “the same” responses shows). However, there is also an increase in the number of negative responses from past to present for both AUS and UK.

As with the chart above, there is a large amount of composers who are reporting a stability in the amount they are earning from commissions. There is also a significant increase in negative responses from both AUS and UK respondents from past to present.

We also asked respondents to share their opinions around six statements which were also included in last year’s survey. You can see the results of this later in this report.

>>Read more
4 // Earnings

Average Fees

Last year, based on the data collected we estimated that the average fee for composers was averaging at £1,392. This year we took a more statistically robust approach to the data to ascertain a more accurate, reflective figure.

By removing the outliers and focusing on respondents who provided us with both the number of commissions and their annual earnings we were able to calculate average fees:

- £918.83 (UK)
- $1,581.30 (AUS)

Highest and Lowest Fees Earned

Respondents were asked to tell us about the highest and lowest fees they earned last year for a single commission.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HIGHEST FEE</th>
<th>LOWEST FEE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>£4,177 (UK)</td>
<td>£1,060 (UK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$7,293 (AUS)</td>
<td>$2,348 (AUS)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The average fee falls below the bottom end of the ranges and given the structure of the question it’s difficult to make an accurate correlation between the two.

The charts on the next page further explore the highest and lowest fees with the added dimension of the scale of the work. We have also added another dimension to this type by way of the type of commissioner which is available online here for exploration.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Digital installation</th>
<th>Small scale (&lt;5 musicians / artists)</th>
<th>Medium scale (5 - 20 musicians / artists)</th>
<th>Large scale (&gt;20 musicians/artists)</th>
<th>Other (please specify)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highest fee average</strong></td>
<td>£784</td>
<td>£1601</td>
<td>£1915</td>
<td>£2258</td>
<td>£1918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lowest fee average</strong></td>
<td>£157</td>
<td>£562</td>
<td>£1010</td>
<td>£760</td>
<td>£223</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

```
"My own experience is of course that the proliferation of composers today has created an impossible surge of demand for commissions, and that of course a great deal should be done for young and emergent composers. However, there is no doubt that established composers find it harder to get commissions than they used to in some cases."
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Quote from UK respondent
Zero Earnings

All the calculations above are based upon any response that is above 0 however there were a significant amount of responses from both surveys that answered that they had earned nothing for their work.

A statistically significant number of respondents entered a zero figure across the questions regarding earnings. These figures are not represented in to the earnings calculations but seem to imply that a sizeable number of composers are quite simply not being paid at all for their commissions.

"One of the great crimes of contemporary music culture is that composers generally don’t get paid. This is across the board. Organisations don’t pay, but other commissioning artists don’t pay either. Everyone expects it for free & that it is a privilege to be a professional composer."

Quote from AUS respondent
Nearly a quarter of UK respondents turned down commissions in the past year, with a similar figure from AUS.

We asked them to explain, in their own words, what their reasons for this had been. Regular themes appeared within the answers comprising: money, time, busy-ness and creative differences. There was, understandably, some overlap between the obviously connected themes of time and busy-ness, but however you might categorise replies falling into one or other of those two themes, there is no getting away from the fact that they represent the majority of the responses.

Time as a theme is also mentioned later on in this report in the Outlook section regarding the amount of time available to rehearse new works.
Negotiating fees

We asked respondents how often they negotiated fees with commissioners. Distribution of the responses was fairly even across the UK with the highest number of respondents choosing ‘rarely’. The AUS results were quite different with over 40% of respondents saying that they always negotiate with the commissioners and 22% saying that they sometimes did indicating that the majority (62%) of respondents from AUS negotiating on a regular basis whereas just over a third of UK respondents do.

What should the fees be?

We asked the respondents to suggest what they considered to be fair fees for a number of commission scenarios. The answers followed a logical progression as the scale and intensity of the work progressed. (The exception here was with regards to digital installations where there were different views about what constituted a digital installation and also what it meant for it be larger or smaller scale.)

The results for this set of questions had a much narrower distribution, so we employed a ‘weighted average’ method to our analysis (as opposed to other questions where we have removed the top and bottom most figures). For this set of questions, we kept in all responses, but weighted the findings when calculating the average, so that when the same figure appears multiple times it has a bigger bearing over the final average calculation.

"I would like to see more consensus as to what constitutes a fair fee. There is such a wide range of opinion on this and no ‘official’ guidelines, this can lead to a situation which sometimes makes it difficult for a composer without a publisher or agent to effectively negotiate a reasonable fee."

Quote from UK respondent
### Table: Suggested fees for set scenarios

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>UK average</th>
<th>UK average in AUS$</th>
<th>AUS Average</th>
<th>AUS average in £GBP</th>
<th>How AUS compares to the UK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 minute piece for soloist</td>
<td>£1,478</td>
<td>$3,217</td>
<td>$2,802</td>
<td>£1,294</td>
<td>-12.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 minute piece for ensemble of 4 musicians</td>
<td>£3,153</td>
<td>$6,860</td>
<td>$5,659</td>
<td>£2,613</td>
<td>-17.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An engagement as a creative performer (eg as an improviser) with a group</td>
<td>£488</td>
<td>$1,070</td>
<td>$899</td>
<td>£415</td>
<td>-15.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A solo engagement as a creative performer</td>
<td>£917</td>
<td>$1,997</td>
<td>$992</td>
<td>£426</td>
<td>-53.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 minute piece for an ensemble of 10-30 musicians</td>
<td>£4,764</td>
<td>$10,363</td>
<td>$9,989</td>
<td>£4,611</td>
<td>-3.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 minute piece for more than 50 musicians</td>
<td>£8,192</td>
<td>$17,821</td>
<td>$13,398</td>
<td>£6,185</td>
<td>-24.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electro-acoustic piece or performance of up to 30 minutes duration</td>
<td>£3,616</td>
<td>$7,833</td>
<td>$6,630</td>
<td>£3,061</td>
<td>-15.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound installation in a gallery space (major venue)</td>
<td>£4,821</td>
<td>$10,573</td>
<td>$7,949</td>
<td>£3,670</td>
<td>-24.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work for staged performance (eg opera, ballet) more than 60 minutes long</td>
<td>£17,532</td>
<td>$37,977</td>
<td>$37,888</td>
<td>£17,491</td>
<td>-0.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound installation in a gallery space (small venue)</td>
<td>£1,842</td>
<td>$4,040</td>
<td>£3,153</td>
<td>£1,456</td>
<td>-21.93%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Colour:**  
- **Green** = change to a more positive answer,  
- **Red** = change to a more negative answer  
- Faded numbers indicate insignificant figures
In comparing this set of questions across the two surveys there is a consistent disparity between the two. In the Australian survey, respondents suggested significantly lower fees across most of the scenarios shown in the table below. The most drastic disparity appears at the bottom of the scale with the recommend AUS fee for ‘A solo engagement as a creative performer’ being 53% lower than the UK fee. At the other end of the scale, both in terms of scale of work and range of disparity, ‘Work for staged performance (eg opera, ballet) more than 60 minutes long’ saw the least disparity with the recommended Australian fee a statistically insignificant 0.23% lower than the UK.

All three quotes from AUS respondents

In Europe over the past twenty years the fees have tended to be around 10 times higher with much better infrastructure, rehearsal time and resources provided. I have always been offered commissions in Europe without having to apply - it would be great if there were more of this in Australia. Some smaller Australian arts organisations are so used to operating on a shoestring that they have no idea what a professional fee is any more. In my experience, commissioning fees here are, in some cases, worse than they were 20 years ago. In addition, lot of commissioning money is now allocated for ‘emerging artists’ who get underpaid even less.

The commissioning landscape in Australia is quite different to other developed countries, especially the USA and Western Europe. I have on may occasions forfeited fees here simply because individuals, ensembles or organisations just could not offer a decent fee, but really wanted a new work from me. I guess, I have a decently paid day job and don’t rely on commissioning fees, but so many of younger composers I know just don’t have the luxury. How do we change the culture and create one where artistic works and the amount of expertise, skill and talent that goes into it is truly appreciated and appropriately awarded?

The relationship between fees and career stage

As might be expected, there was some difference within these figures from composers at different stages of their career as shown in the charts on the next page. In the majority of cases there was correlation between increase in the amount of years as a composer and the fee amount suggestion for the individual scenario. The correlation was strongest at the top where composers which 20+ years experience suggested the highest fee for every scenario.
### Chart: Suggested fees for set scenarios x length of time as a composer (UK)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>J</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 minute piece for soloist</td>
<td>15 minute piece for ensemble of 4 musicians</td>
<td>An engagement as a creative performer (eg as an improviser) with a group</td>
<td>A solo engagement as a creative performer</td>
<td>15 minute piece for an ensemble of 10-30 musicians</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chart: Suggested fees for set scenarios x length of time as a composer (AUS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>J</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 minute piece for an ensemble of more than 50 musicians</td>
<td>Electro-acoustic piece or performance of up to 30 minutes duration</td>
<td>Sound installation in a gallery space (major venue)</td>
<td>Work for staged performance (eg opera, ballet) more than 60 minutes long</td>
<td>Sound installation in a gallery space (small venue)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Respondents were asked to respond to six statements with their levels of agreement (‘strongly disagree’ (1) to ‘strongly agree’ (5)), which we also included in last year’s survey.

- Commission fees are a significant proportion of my overall income
- Most of my commissions take place overseas
- I am active in fundraising for commissioning fees
- There are the same number of commissions taking place as there have always been
- Fees for commissions are better now than they used to be
- There is less rehearsal/preparation time for new works than there used to be
We then analysed the responses both in terms of the two different surveys (UK and AUS) and also the two different years (2015 and 2014).

2014 and 2015

In both cases the only firmly positive response to statements was to the negatively phrased question: ‘There is less rehearsal/preparation time for new works than there used to be’. The changes that were statistically significant all move further towards the negative end of the scale, apart from a slightly more positive response to the statement that ‘Commission fees are a significant proportion of my overall income’. However this still has only just entered in the positive end of the spectrum.

Table: How have opinions in the UK changed from 2014 to 2015?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>There are the same number of commissions taking place as there have always been</th>
<th>Fees for commissions are better now than they used to be</th>
<th>There is less rehearsal/preparation time for new works than there used to be</th>
<th>Commission fees are a significant proportion of my overall income</th>
<th>Most of my commissions take place overseas</th>
<th>I am active in fundraising for commissioning fees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>UK 2014</strong></td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>2.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>UK 2015</strong></td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>2.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% change</strong></td>
<td>-8.58%</td>
<td>-8.61%</td>
<td>2.47%</td>
<td>12.70%</td>
<td>-9.96%</td>
<td>-1.04%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale: 1= Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree

Colour: Green = change to a more positive answer,
Red = change to a more negative answer

*Faded numbers indicate insignificant figures
UK and AUS

There was less significant variance between the UK and AUS responses with ‘Fees for commissions are better now than they used to be’ garnering a more positive response from AUS, but still on the negative side. AUS respondents were less active in fundraising for commissioning fees and those fees also represented were also a significant source of income for less of the respondents which when reflecting back on the fee recommendations reflects that lower nature of the responses.

Table: How do opinions differ between UK and AUS?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>UK (2015)</th>
<th>AUS</th>
<th>% change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There are the same number of</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>1.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commissions taking place as</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>there have always been</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>12.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fees for commissions are</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>-2.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>better now than they used to</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>-10.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>-3.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is less rehearsal/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>preparation time for new</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>works than there used to be</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commission fees are a</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>-3.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>significant proportion of my</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>-9.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>overall income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of my commissions take</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>place overseas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am active in fundraising</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for commissioning fees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale: 1= Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree
Colour: Green = change to a more positive answer,
Red = change to a more negative answer
*Faded numbers indicate insignificant figures
7// The making of this report

Tools used to create this report

Typeform – survey data collection (AUS)
Form Assembly – survey data collection (UK)
Google Fusion Tables – choropleth maps
Infogr.am - charts
TimDream - wordclouds
InDesign - creation of the report

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Sound and Music have a number of opportunities available to composers throughout the different stages of their personal development, and we are committed to supporting new music and developing the audience for it.

Sound and Music have also developed the Composer’s and Producer’s Toolkits, which aim to provide support and advice for composers.