



Campaign Sheet in partnership with Quiet Scotland

Turn down the volume

The Scottish Older People's Assembly (SOPA) exists to give a **strong voice to older people** about their experience of life in Scotland, their challenges and concerns, and to celebrate the positive contribution that older people make to society. **Quiet Scotland** campaigns for freedom from intrusive background music in Scotland. We seek to limit the presence of unwanted background music in shops, restaurants and NHS spaces. We are particularly active on behalf of older people.

INTRODUCTION

As we grow older,

- our perception of high frequencies diminishes and low frequencies are magnified. In consequence, older people often hear background music at a louder volume.
- we increasingly suffer from hearing loss, tinnitus, hyperacusis (heightened sensitivity to sound) and other hearing problems.
- we are more prone to visual impairment and rely more on sound to help find our way around.
- many of us will develop dementia. People living with dementia can find unfamiliar background music particularly distressing.
- we are more likely to find ourselves at the doctor's surgery or in hospital.

Background music can cause distress to older people, and to those with conditions such as autism and brain injury. We may have no choice but to listen to piped music in waiting rooms or other people's televisions and music on wards, where the use of headphones or earphones is not enforced.

"It's absolute torture for many people to have to listen to someone else's taste in music or broadcasting and to be helpless to escape from it. Also, it makes life so much more stressful if you are hard of hearing and trying to converse with your visitor, companion or staff."

There is evidence that older people subject to ubiquitous unwanted music are discouraged from venturing beyond the home and become more isolated as a result. This excludes us from public spaces in ways which contravene the Equality Act 2010.

"Background music can create challenges for people who are deaf as they go about their daily lives, making it harder for people to hear what others are saying; that is why one of the asks of our Access for All in Retail campaign is that shops and businesses reduce background noise and piped music."

Teri Devine, RNID Director of Scotland.

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SUGGESTIONS FOR SHOP AND RESTAURANT OWNERS

Currently, supermarkets that recognise there is a problem tend to offer customers with sensory problems just a music-free hour a week, often as early as 8am – 9am. Please allow one whole day during weekday shopping times, or one morning and one afternoon, plus a reasonable slot at weekends. Please supply clearly visible information on dates and times for quiet shopping or eating out, and the reasons behind the policy.

SUGGESTIONS FOR HOSPITALS, DOCTORS' AND DENTAL SURGERIES

Please make areas available that are free of music, radio and TV for those who need them. If quiet areas are not available, please be prepared to turn the music, radio or TV down or off on request. If patients or staff need to shout to be heard, confidentiality can be compromised.

“By the time I get to see a doctor my blood pressure has gone through the roof, I’m tense and I just want to get out of there.”

ASKING FOR MUSIC TO BE SWITCHED OFF OR TURNED DOWN

Many people find it difficult to complain about music in public places. However, if nothing is said, waiting rooms, shops and restaurants won’t know how widespread this problem is, nor that they might be losing business.

Here are some suggestions for positive ways in which you can get your views across.

- If music has been recently introduced, emphasise how much you have enjoyed shopping or dining in the past without the music, ask why the policy has changed.
- At the check-out, ask a general question, such as “Who chooses your music?” or “Are you enjoying the music?” Many staff also dislike having to listen to unwanted music all day.
- Write to the CEO or person in charge. Try to ask a question, point out some research or provide personal experience so that they have to think about their reply.
- If your letter is ignored, or a point is not taken up, write again, asking politely for an answer.
- If you are booking a meal or hotel, ask in advance if they play piped music. Ask how loud it is and mention your hearing difficulty or health issue. This helps emphasise that background music is not universally appreciated.
- If you find it difficult to complain at the hospital or GP’s, write a letter or email.
- Make a point of praising businesses that don’t play music. You could write to the local paper or post on social media.

Who you can contact if you would like some support

- Your local councillor, MSP or MP
- The Equality and Advisory Support Service www.equalityadvisoryservice.com
- RNID Access for All in Retail campaign. RNID - National hearing loss charity
- SOPA’s Your issue Your Voice information sheets www.scotopa.org.uk

Your Issue, Your Voice, 2021
www.scotopa.org.uk

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