

3rd July 2023



SUPPORTING
CONNECTING
INFLUENCING

Dear Secretary of State for Education and Minister of State for Schools,

I am writing as the Chair of the UK Association for Music Education – Music Mark, on behalf of the Music Education Hub partnerships across England to raise concerns linked to their ability to deliver the government’s new National Plan for Music Education.

England should rightly be proud of the high-quality music education provided to pupils in and out of school and long-term investment from your department has helped to achieve this. However, whilst Music Education Hubs have demonstrated an excellent return on government investment over the past 10 years – including in 2021/22 where the DfE grant represented just 36% of the total budget spent on musical learning opportunities and school support across the country – relentless increases in costs such as pay, venue hire and utility bills, and a rise in pupil numbers (and more crucially, pupils registered for free school meals) is making it harder to ensure access to musical learning is available to all children and young people.

On behalf of the sector, Music Mark would ask government to reflect on the expectations it has for children and young people’s music education and consider an uplift to current funding levels at least in line with inflation, as well as looking at its ongoing support from 2025/6 onwards linked to the comprehensive spending review when it takes place next year.

This letter, however, is also to highlight a specific, inequitable, funding cut, due in 2024, which will result in the removal of c.£1.2m from the music education ecology.

Within the guidance recently published by Arts Council England, whom you have commissioned to run the tendering process to appoint new Music Hubs for September 2024 onwards, there is a statement which indicates that independent music education providers – i.e., those not attached to a Local Authority – will no longer be supported to cover the 2019 increase to employer contributions for staff who benefit from the Teachers' Pension. Among many others, I have received the following two comments from music education providers who would be affected by this:

‘We are very efficient and there is really nothing left to save money on! ... If we make redundancies, then we cannot fully deliver what we are funded to deliver. If our Singing Leader goes, no mass singing events anymore! If our Community Coordinator goes, we have to close our Saturday Music Centre as we will have no capacity to run it!’

‘It is significant, and we wouldn’t be able to continue to run the Teachers Pension scheme which could have a seismic impact on our workforce and therefore delivery of services!’

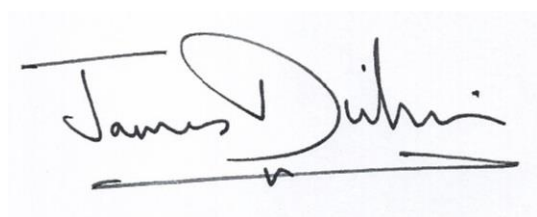
The impact of this decision will only affect some music education providers, but where it does it will have an impact on their ability to provide musical learning, and the ‘patchiness’ government has committed to address is more likely to be compounded in those areas.

Music Mark would therefore urge the DfE to reverse its decision and provide an ongoing commitment to support all music education employers who are providing the Teachers' Pension scheme to their employees.

On behalf of the music education sector across England, I would like to thank the Department of Education for the focus which has been put on the importance of music education over the last three years through the publication of the Model Music Curriculum and the subsequent refresh of the National Plan for Music Education. Music has the power to transform a pupil's learning – both through the study of a subject which employs over 145,000 people and contributes over £4bn to the UK economy, but also through its evident contribution to wider learning, wellbeing, and social skills.

I look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Most respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Dickinson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "D" and a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

James Dickinson
Chair, The UK Association for Music Education - Music Mark

CC: Baroness Fleet, Chair of the National Plan for Music Education Monitoring Board