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## Westminster Forum Speech 10/11/21

### Bridget Whyte

I have to admit that I feel quite daunted by being asked to start off this forum, and by extension set the tone for this morning, especially as there are so many great people joining the discussions over the next three hours. I am sure that the whole morning promises to provide some interesting discussion and debate so here's hoping I can get us started on the right track!

The topic I have been given to talk about is **Immediate priorities for music education and looking ahead to the new National Plan**

Straight away, you link Music Education with the National Plan, and the conversation focusses on England. I would like to start by acknowledging this point, whilst recognizing that some delegates may well work in one of the other UK Nations. Much of what I and my fellow speakers will say today is likely to be relevant and helpful to anyone working in Music Education, but I felt it was important to clock that currently England is the only country in the UK with a formal National Plan. I say 'currently' because, excitingly, work is already underway for a plan to be published in Wales, but as I said, we'll be focused primarily on music education in England.

So, back to our topic.

As most of you will already know the English National Plan for Music Education is in the process of being 'refreshed' by the DfE and the DCMS. The announcement that it would be refreshed was made back in January 2019, but for various reasons – including of course the pandemic – the work has taken longer than we had all hoped and the understanding is that publication will be in the spring of 2022. It's a little late of course, as the current plan had an initial 'use by date' of March 2020. But having been re-labeled as a 'best before date' however (a bit like that old pack of bread flour in the back of the cupboard you bought in lockdown 1), the 2011 publication is still OK to be used and remains our guide for music education provision in England.

I could talk at length about how we came to have a national plan in the first place, what it said it would do, and what has actually happened in the past decade since it was published (on the 25<sup>th</sup> November 2011 – so almost exactly 10 years ago!), but rather than look back, I thought it might be more useful to present a few

thoughts on the first half of the topic I was given... I will of course reflect a little more on what is being called National Plan 2, but as that's yet to be published, let alone implemented, let's start by thinking about the 'Immediate Priorities for Music Education'.

I am sure if I asked each of you attending this forum to write down three things which you feel are priorities for music education many of you would say the same things. Indeed, to help me prepare for this presentation I went onto twitter and asked for thoughts.

Here is a summary of the responses – 22 of them – that I received, none of which are likely to be that surprising to you I'm sure!

Of course, **funding** was perhaps the most popular answer, and I'd like to start there. It is probably the first thing many of you thought about and is indeed a key point.

Let's start with a quick bit of maths....

The approximate population in English Schools (5-16yrs) is currently just under 9 million – this is the figure given by the Office for National Statistics and is based on the annual school census. The music education grant allocated for this financial year to Music Education Hub lead organisations for the delivery of the Core and Extension Roles as outlined in the 2011 National Plan is **£76.1m**.

A quick calculation will tell you that this amount of money is in effect c. £8.56 per pupil (and that doesn't take into consideration the 17 and 18 year olds who are not within the school census so are not part of that simple calculation).

Of course, not every pupil in an English state school will want access to music education provision beyond that provided by the school as part of formal and extracurricular activity – which is likely to be funded by the Direct Schools Grant, parents and school fundraising activities. However, it remains a very small amount with which to achieve great things. And I've looked back over the figures from the past six years and that per pupil amount has been decreasing, primarily because pupil numbers have increased (by half a million).

And, if we're talking about increases, as well as pupil numbers increasing, costs have also increased – pay, pensions, travel costs, equipment.... It's clear that the total amount available to spend on ensuring every child has access to a high-quality music education isn't keeping pace.

We have not had an annual report of the Hub Data Return for a couple of years so the figures I can access only go up to the 17/18 financial year,

But even over the years which we have published data for, there is a worrying trend that additional funding brought in by the hub partnership from most other sources has been decreasing as a percentage of the total hub income. There have been some strands of funding which have increased including fundraising

from sponsorship and Youth Music, but worryingly those lines where we see an increase year on year includes parental income!

I remember being involved in conversations in early 2012 with Music Services as we looked at the implementation of the hub network and heard many being really concerned that the expectations of the soon to be formed Hubs to deliver the set of core and extension roles against the funding being allocated was unrealistic; not least as that first year saw funding go down from £82m to £62m with further decreases over the following two years.

It was a day to celebrate when the annual grant increased from the unacceptable lowest level of £58m in 2014/15 to a more realistic one of £74.5m in 2015/16, but for us to have seen a paltry £1.7m increase since then is simply not acceptable.

Later this morning colleagues are going to talk about many areas of challenge in music education – delivering an inspiring music curriculum, ensuring there is a quality, qualified workforce in place (I'll come back to this myself shortly) and ensuring that every child can fulfil their potential as a musician, but at the heart of each of these discussions is investing enough funding.

The UK is coming out of a financially crippling pandemic, but the recent comprehensive spending review gave us hope that the government wants to invest in the future. Let us hope that they understand that that investment must include realistic and sustained funding for the quality music education they regularly state they want for every pupil.

In a meeting last week with hub leaders from the West Midlands one of them pointed out that after a national disaster the government allocates funding to rebuild – we now need funding to rebuild music education.

I'm going to move on to consider some of the other priorities colleagues suggested to me were key, but before I do, I have a few words about **instruments** – not something that was mentioned in the Twitter conversation, but more and more often talked about as I meet with music service colleagues.

Whilst of course it is better for instruments to be in schools being used by pupils, I always get excited when I go to visit a Music Service who has a base which includes an instrument store. Seeing the rows of violin or trumpet cases on shelves speaks to me of the feelings I remember having when I was given my first violin as a 4 year old. I remember the mix of emotions - fear of dropping it whilst excitement that I was going to get to play it!

Over a three-year period from 2008 to 2011 Music Services were allocated funding to replace and increase their instrument stocks and many of these instruments are the ones I see in music service stores. The only thing is that regardless of how careful a child is with an instrument, accidents happen and the wear of tear of years of use by a succession of 7 year olds is going to take its toll on that violin or trumpet. No national investment has been made in instruments since 2011 and whilst music services and their partners have

worked hard to maintain their stocks through repairs and/or replacing them through income from hire schemes and fundraising, the cupboards are not as full as they were. If there is a continued belief that, in addition to the musical learning provided by schools as part of the national curriculum which will include making music, every pupil should have the opportunity to widen their musical horizons through learning one or more musical instruments with their class, not only do we need the funding to pay for the tutors, we also need the instruments too! And it goes without saying that we need to ensure that what is available meets the needs of all pupils – for instance that there is access to adapted instruments or additional equipment for children with a disability, or a range of instruments to support the rich and diverse cultures represented in our school population.

So, having got the funding point out of the way, what about the other immediate priorities for music education?

I have no doubt that everyone who is going to speak over the next few hours will talk about **teachers and the need for a skilled workforce** both in schools and more broadly. I shall leave them to say more, but it was a recurring point in the twitter conversation and I would agree that it is an immediate priority.

There were two comments I received which I think sum the challenge around schoolteachers well:

Dr Ally Daubney who said *'we need to support teachers already in schools in teaching music.... Amazing provision in schools comes from within'*

And Keith Evans who identified that dealing with inconsistencies in curriculum provision, breadth and quality would best be done through sustained CPD for all teachers.

I would however want to also say that it isn't just great teachers in schools, well-trained to go into the classroom and regularly receiving opportunities to top up their knowledge and skills, but we also need more instrumental teachers too. Almost every music service I have spoken to over the past few weeks has reported that they have more work coming in, but they don't have the teachers to do it! There is an element of having THE RIGHT teachers – such as those who can provide curriculum support and/or deliver whole class teaching, or a need for more teachers of particularly popular instruments, such as guitar, but there are signs that there is now a national shortage of instrumental teachers – regardless of what is published in the spring in the national plan refresh, if we don't have enough teachers now this is an immediate priority we need to consider.

Accessibility is next on the list.

When I'm preparing a speech like this, I often question a word's meaning and go to google to read a textbook definition. For the word **Accessibility** I got this:

A few years ago, I attended the Heads of Instrumental Teaching Services conference in Scotland and was challenged by one of their speakers to consider the difference between equality and equity. I have since become quite an advocate for equity of access to music education. I think it is important that there is equality of opportunity to begin to explore and learn music, but to avoid continuing to talk about a post-code lottery and recognizing that the coffers are not a magic porridge pot, we must look at how we ensure equity in progression. However, regardless of whether you agree with equitable or equal, the word 'access' is key. Irrespective of where a child lives or their personal circumstances, they should be able to access a rich and high-quality music education. Not one of you attending this forum would disagree, but I expect most would say that we are not there yet. It has been and remains an immediate priority that we all work to make this a reality. Of course, my points about funding, instruments and staffing all need to be in place, but I would suggest that access should probably be our No.1 priority!

So accessibility, funding and the workforce would be my top three priorities, but let's look at the others identified by my fellow twitterers....

Simon Glenister highlighted **technology** in his response to my call out and stated:

*'.... music technology is an amazing engaging platform for developing digital skills and engaging those that often fall out of mainstream provision.'*

This of course links back to the previous point about accessibility, but also recognizes that technology can broaden musical engagement as a tool to assist with learning, an instrument and a platform for performance. There are many who are calling for more to be said about the use of technology in music education within the 'refresh' plan – a subject which was pretty much a footnote in the current one – and yes, we need to acknowledge the many uses of technology, but in an ideal world, and I accept we're not there yet, we wouldn't have to single out technology as it would be a given that it was part of the music education ecology.

Based on the titles given next to each of today's speakers names, I am guessing that they, like me are all working in the profession. Of course, the UN definition of a young person is someone under 25, so I should not make an assumption that one or more of those who will present this morning might not be included in that peer group, but it is interesting that we are involved in a three-hour discussion on music education and we will not be hearing from **young people** - the 'consumers' - of a 5-18yrs music education!

I am always inspired by what young people have to say about their experiences and aspirations for the future and a great example of that was hearing from young people at the Music for Youth Prom last week. It is good to note that 275 young people responded to the public consultation which the Department for

Education ran in the spring of 2020 on the future of the National Plan. That was just 5% of the total respondents, but their voice was heard.

To quote from another one of the responses to my tweet, Rachel Bee summed it up well when she wrote '*Make music resonate with students. Teach what they need and want to learn*'. We can't do that without listening to them.

Again, I will leave much of the discussion about schools and their role in music education to the panels later this morning, and to Mark Philips, but I do think there is still more to do to **educate school leaders about the value of music provision in their school**. Professor Sue Hallam's fantastic report called [The Power of Music](#) highlights why music is such a great subject – not just in its own right but also as a tool for developing wider social skills, supporting wellbeing and building communities. I fear however, that it is not Professor Hallam and her fellow academics, or indeed organisations like Music Mark who are going to be able to win the argument with sceptic school leaders though. I think it needs advocates from within – head teachers talking to head teachers, and perhaps even more powerfully, young people talking to their head teachers.

And finally, let's talk about the 'P' word.....

Everyone who knows me will know that I regularly talk about how a Music Education Hub is a concept not an organisation and that concept is **partnership**. And I often go further saying that a hub partnership shouldn't work *with* a school; a hub should *include* a school as part of that partnership. If we are to help children and young people develop as musicians, we need to help them to join the dots between the music educations they receive.

It is a shame that the idea of a music passport which was developed and piloted by Youth Music back in the noughties didn't really take off but finding ways to help everyone work together and communicate with each other so that interest and talent is nurtured and developed is so important!

Of course, I was asked to talk about immediate priorities looking forward to the National Plan. As I said, it's not due to be published until the spring next year, so it is hard to know with any certainty what it will say.

As some of you will know, I'm on an advisory panel of people supporting the two departments currently, but it will be the civil servants who will write the plan and government ministers who will sign it off.

However here are some of my thoughts...

When the original plan was published, the DfE only covered education from 5 to 18yrs. It now has a broader remit, and the ongoing research evidence of the importance of **music in early years, and the call for a pipeline into the industry**, would indicate that the 'refreshed' plan should consider before and after school musical learning. No child should have first access to musical learning at 5, and how will we

populate the music industry which contributes billions to the UK economy and employs over 2 million people, without clear pathways after leaving school? Early Years and Higher Education are two massive topics – probably both will be touched on during this morning’s debate. I won’t say more now, but don’t underestimate how passionate I – and many colleagues in the sector – are about both!

When the last National Plan was published there was confirmation of three years of funding attached to elements of it. It didn’t talk about funding of itself though and I am sure that this will be the case again. It is an obvious point but **whatever is written will need investment**, and realistic, long-term investment to make it work. For the investment beyond that expected of schools in providing musical learning and activities in and out of the classroom, there needs to be at least a three-year inflation-linked funding settlement to allow for music educators to plan and deliver sustained programmes. Attached to that, it will need to recognise the importance of investment in resources – instruments and staff – to deliver its aspirations for children and young people.

Crucially it will need to identify ways to address inequity of access. To borrow a phrase from elsewhere in Westminster, there is an ongoing need for levelling up. That needs investment, but perhaps it also needs the plan to consider the wider picture of music education and not hold music services and other partner music education organisations to account for gaps in provision expected by other partners such as schools.

We can’t put the genie back in the bottle – technology is an integral part of music education. It was before the pandemic, but is even more so now and it will be part of music education going forward.

Young people are musicians, they consume and make music regardless of what we provide, so how do we learn from them and support them?

As schools build back, music must be at the heart of provision – not just because government and Ofsted recommend it (although this ‘refreshed’ *government* plan must be highlighted to schools), but because it is a subject like no other.

And I hope that whatever ‘refresh’ means, the new National Plan will have partnership working at its heart – for the sector to work together at a national, regional and local level.

Dick Hallam always used to say that we need to put children at the centre of our work. With that in mind, I wonder if we can think of the image of a wheel. We then put the child at the centre, and the spokes going out represent the various ways in which they access music and learn – there will be school; the music service; other partners within the local music education hub such as an orchestra or vocal ensemble; and of course the other ways they learn more informally. In this image I found to use there are five sets of four spokes so we could imagine that there might be four different musical learning opportunities in each of five learning environments.

School would provide the national curriculum, but also extracurricular opportunities too. The hub lead and its partners might provide a music centre, ensembles, trips to live events, and there will be family and friends who will influence and educate them musically, the films/TV and computer games music they listen to, and of course the internet – Spotify, Apple music, Amazon music, YouTube etc....

The last three examples of what a set of spokes might be are unlikely to be part of the Hub, but how can those that represent organisations and individuals that are, help to connect together everything being learnt – consciously or unconsciously by children and young people? Only by doing that can we help them to form their wheel and ensure each and every child can see their music education in a holistic way and develop their musical journey where they would want to take it.

Thank you!