

Westminster Forum Speech

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Bridget Whyte

Topic: *The current state of music education, ambitions going forward and the implementation of the National Plan for Music Education*

Thank you for inviting me to speak. I should start by saying that the majority of my presentation this morning will focus on the ‘refreshed’ National Plan for Music Education – The Power of Music to Change Lives which was published in June 2022. Known as NPME2 it is a plan for music education in England. I will also touch on the other UK National Plan for Music Education for Wales which was published in May, but thought it was important to say that ‘the plan’ mentioned in the title of this Keynote refers to the English plan.

So, let’s get started. I thought it might be useful to have a very quick history lesson.

Many of you may well have seen this slide before, but hopefully it will be useful to help us think about how we have come to the ‘current state of music education’.

Each of us will have a different date for the ‘golden age’ and it is likely that many who are attending this conference will have a rosy memory of free instrumental tuition, a thriving music department in every school and a workforce that was employed by local education authorities across the country. That’s certainly my memory of growing up in Hampshire in the 70s and 80s. So what changed?

Well much of the change has been due to wider educational and local authority reforms. But what has also changed is that there has been a growing call for ED&I – equality (or equity), diversity and inclusion in music education – something I don’t think was as strong a priority in that rosy era.

I was working in Surrey for the Music Service in the late 1990s when the Standards Fund was announced. After a decade of decline the government announced that it would invest funding both to ensure the survival of music services, but also to expand their work. For Surrey, that meant a partnership with other music services in the South East and the setting up of a project called Rhythmix – aimed at reaching young people who were not engaging in the music education offer traditionally provided by music services. Projects in Rap, DJ-ing and Rock and Pop were developed and run in youth centres across the four authorities involved. That project, and many others funded by the new National Foundation for Youth Music, saw an increase in music education projects which were reaching a wider audience of children and young people. From singing groups with new borns to technology projects in young offender institutions, music Education was **diversifying**.

A revisit to David Blunket's statement in the early 2000s saw the introduction of a set of pilots of a new idea – wider opportunities. Whole classes of pupils learning an instrument together. And a National Singing Programme aimed to see every primary school using singing not only to support musical learning but wider educational and social development too. This was a strong step in increasing **equality**.

At the same time, organisations like Ex Cathedra and Drake Music were championing the importance of music for all children and young people regardless of circumstance or disability. Of course many music services and other music education organisations were also considering this in their work, but the topic of **inclusion** was becoming more mainstream.

Skip on to 2010 and Darren Henley's review of music education with renewed call for better **partnership** working – I say renewed as it had already been identified through the work of the Music Manifesto.

Now we're getting into recent history and everyone attending today is likely to know what happened next – Hub Partnerships were formed, funding was allocated and a set of Core and Extension Roles were the roadmap for delivery. Of course the plan was much more than 'What Hubs Must Do' – but as I said at a Westminster Forum back in 2020, the DfE didn't really highlight the plan to schools when it was published and wider educational and curriculum reform meant that schools didn't engage in the role that they had been given within this first plan.

Let's skip forward to 2022 then... So 10 years after the original plan for England was published what's changed?

Well, as I said before there's been educational and curriculum reform and I expect many of those speaking later will talk about that. But other things have had an impact on music education too. I won't go through the points on this slide one by one – although I will come back to a few of them later - but in considering the current state of music education I wanted to touch on a couple of points.

Technology moves at such a pace and there has been so much digital innovation in relation to music education we could probably run a whole forum on the topic. The use of technology as an instrument, a composition tool, to record and broadcast performances as well as to manage and administer music education has grown exponentially. Indeed we should acknowledge that without technology the music education sector would have had an even harder time through the pandemic, and whilst none of us would want to go back into another lockdown, the learning from that time has and will continue to have an impact on the way we learn, consume and share music.

And the past two years have seen **ED&I** much more centre stage. David Stanley will say more about this and most of the second half of this forum will consider the importance of these words within the context of music education going forward, but I wanted to highlight the current focus on ED&I is changing everything about music education - how it is governed, the workforce who manage and teach, children and young

people's perceptions of music as a subject they can study, and the programming/ curriculum/ repertoire being offered to study.

Of course I can't talk about the current state of music education without mentioning the **finances**. Last year in my keynote for this forum I talked extensively about the challenges facing music education through sustained under-funding. I am fully aware that there are pressures on government spending and it is to be celebrated that there is specific funding over and above that allocated to schools to deliver a broad and ambitious curriculum which includes music. However, the ambitions of the 2011 plan and those of the new 2022 plan cannot be realised on a budget which has been almost static for 5 years despite inflation rising steadily. And as we start this academic year, the reality of the cost of living crisis is also going to have an impact on music education. The Hub Data return for 2019/20 indicated that parents were contributing over £40m (19.1%) to the music education economy (up from £31.7m or 16.9% in 2012/13) and that is without the hidden figure within the schools contribution (£59m) which is likely to include parental income paid to schools who in turn pay music services or music teachers.

Having considered how we got to the current state, I'm going to move on to the second part of the title of this presentation – **Ambition**.

Ambition is defined as a strong desire to do or achieve something. There has always been a strong desire in England for children and young people to receive a quality music education, and as far back as the late 90s the DfE has wanted all children to access the opportunity to learn a musical instrument. In 2011 the first plan added that children should also 'make music with others, learn to sing and to have the opportunity to progress to the next level of excellence if they wish to'.

The 'refreshed' National Plan's vision has echoes of past statements.

This updated vision however rightly recognises the value of creating music *as well as* playing and singing, and the importance of investing in and promoting music as a career.

The vision is supported by three goals which are then explored within the three chapters of the plan. This is a National plan outlining the government's ambitions, but interestingly a key ambition of the plan is that there should be both local and regional plans too:

This layering aims to ensure that the music education children and young people receive is provided within the local and regional context. Each layer's plan will consider where children and young people are, what the opportunities might be for them, and how barriers to access and inclusion might be addressed.

Returning to the three goals, the first goal looks at music's position in formal education – in early years settings and schools.

At last the plan recognises that musical learning does not start in year 1 and that ‘*A strong foundation of music in the early years is vital for all children*’. In 2011 the DfE focussed on 5-18yrs, with a focus now on 0-25yrs it is of course right that the plan should look beyond key stages 1 to 5.

There is just one page on Early Years music, and how the ambitions of that page will be realised have yet to be made clear.

What is clear however is that schools are central to the new plan. 29 of the 59 pages of detail within the plan are dedicated to the tripartite role of schools. The Plan was launched by the Secretary of State for Education in post in June 2022 – Nahim Zahawi – and even though the launch was on a Saturday, school leaders noticed and commented. I expect colleagues in the first panel will talk more about this, but as you can see the ambitions are high!

Chapter 2 explores the role of Music Hubs.

Yes, the name has changed slightly and the core and extension roles have gone, but the ambition remains – a partnership of organisations working together to support schools and broaden the music education offer for *all* children and young people at a local level.

Underpinning the work Music Hubs will do going forward are five strategic functions.

These replace the Core and Extension Roles and partnership, schools, progression, inclusion and sustainability become the corner stones of each Music Hub’s purpose. The first four of these are perhaps expected and whilst the detail behind each one is ambitious it is perhaps the ambitions within the fifth strategic function which will be most interesting for Music Hubs to unpick going forward. **Sustainability** is interpreted here as strategic, financial and operational and considers the workforce, revenue streams, accountability and environmental responsibility. Workforce is part of the topic for the first panel, I’ve already talked a little about funding, and it is no surprise to see that government will want to monitor their investment, however, although there is no doubt everyone must be mindful of the climate crisis and look at how best to respond to it, I feel sure many in the sector have found its inclusion in this plan interesting and will be challenged as to how to ensure a meaningful response to this.

Moving on to the final chapter – this is where we find more detail about the ambition to link music education with industry.

As you will know, I was honoured to be part of the panel supporting the two government departments – the DfE and DCMS – as they ‘refreshed’ the plan. A key discussion within our meetings was the ‘talent pipeline’. How do we support a child to progress from whole class instrumental tuition at Key Stage 2 to becoming part of the a quality workforce that can maintain the economic value and global ‘soft power’ which the music industry has? There will be many pathways – and not all of them linear. The Music

Commission, published in 2019, stated that ‘No two journeys, in and through musical learning, are the same.’ That can make it hard for one teacher, or even one organisation to support young people to progress as far as they would like. Of course that is why the idea of a Hub – a partnership of organisations working together – is so important.

So too are our organisations and centres of training who provide opportunities for our elite musicians – and yes I think we should own that word just as the Sports sector does for those who will train for the profession. Coming back to the call for a stronger focus on ED&I there is a need to ensure that elite training is available to all young people whatever instrument or genre they choose, although again perhaps the pathway will not look the same as that of a classical musician. I look forward to hearing more from the panel at the end of the morning who will explore this further.

I hope I won’t steel their thunder by saying just a little more about the Music Industry. I think it is vital that when we use that term, we include Music Education as part of it – there are thousands of musicians working as teachers full or part-time, in and out of schools, employed and freelance. How we promote music teaching as a career is something we all need to consider – not everyone will want to be a teacher, but it should not be the case that it’s a backstop if other options don’t succeed. An ambitious music education plan needs a high quality workforce.

This is an ambitious plan, as it should be, but when might we see those ambitions realised?

The plan was published on the 25th June 2022 and not much has moved on following two months of significant turmoil within Westminster. However, it is hoped that the pace can now pick up again and that our new ministers at the DfE and DCMS will support civil servants and ACE to move forward.

It has been confirmed that Arts Council England will remain the Fundholder and they have already started to look at how they will run the investment process which expects to see fewer Hub Lead Organisations. How many fewer is not clear, but it is understood that fewer strategic leads will not necessarily mean the merger or loss of music education delivery organisations. The network of music services, orchestras, venues, community music organisations and others will be vital in supporting schools and trusts with their music development plans and in preparing the local plan into which the school/trust plans feed.

The progression pilots will be developed with new money from the DfE to support them

The new Music Hubs will identify Lead Schools on their patch who will support other schools.

Four centres of excellence will be identified from within the hub network – each focused on an area of music education which needs specialist and targeted support.

And after no national investment in instrument stocks for ten years, the DfE Announced with the publication of the Plan a capital fund of £25m which will distributed across the country – with details of

how and when to follow – to ensure that the ambitions of the plan are not hampered by a lack of instruments. I hope that the funding will not only buy new instruments but also consider the stocks that need simple repairs or replacement parts/cases, and also look at where existing stocks might need redistributed.

There has been little communication since the publication of the plan about the timing of implementation, but here is what was said in June:

We are now well and truly in the autumn, so we await further details – although we have had reassurance from Arts Council England that tendering will not start until after Christmas whilst more consultation takes place.

Before I finish and hand back to the Chair, I thought it might be worth just saying a few words about the National Plan for Wales. Published in May 2022, it's ambitions are also for a joined up approach to musical learning which links provision in and out of schools.

Linked to the new Welsh Curriculum, the Welsh plan hopes to promote equality by ensuring access for all learners to play, sing, take part, progress and create music. There is much that is similar with the English plan, but it is interesting to see a focus on health and well-being through music too (one of the coloured dots on the diagram which I appreciate you cannot read but which you can find in the plan).

What is also interesting is that a National Music Service has been created for Wales. On the face of it it would appear that the plan promotes the creation of one service delivering across the country (as is being implemented in Northern Ireland following the amalgamation of the five education authorities into one). However, that is not the case, with both regional and local structures still in place. The National Music Service is actually similar to the role Arts Council England plays – it sits within the Welsh Local Government Association to distribute the funding, it will monitor and evaluate the delivery, provide national training and support and will be tasked at looking at the creation of a national instrument, resource and equipment library. It is early days for the implementation of the plan, and as with England there are concerns about having the workforce needed to implement it, but with increased investment from government – from £1.4m to over £4m - it is hoped that the ambitions within it will have some chance of being realised.

In summary then, the current state of music education – both in England and Wales - might best be summed up in one word: **transitory**

There are two plans, they are ambitious and each has the potential to ensure all children and young people have the opportunities and benefits that musical learning can provide, but, especially in England, it is very early days and until there is more clarity on the road ahead, we must wait.

Thank you.