

To the members of the Culture Committee,

I am writing in regards to the full briefing submitted by the The RWCMD in relation to the sudden closure of it's Junior departments and the impact that this has subsequently had on the accessibility and provision of music and drama provision for young people and my concerns as to how stark the future of access to youth training in the expressive arts is becoming in our country.

My son was a student on the advanced/step 4 course at YRWCMD for nearly 6 years, he is a violinist and now 15 and his attendance was made possible by the provision of the bursary available. His entire music friendship base has been rent assunder by the closure and we know many families who have been affected by this. Some have felt forced to relocate to England so as to be able to facilitate their children's musical progression, others have had to curtail or abandon studies due to lack of availability or financial resources and many are now struggling with the effect that this has had on the mental health and well being of their children, as they no longer have community that they can relate to and are struggling with the isolation.

It is inarguable that Wales has now lost a major provision of training for highly talented young musicians and actors. The RWCMD itself recognises this and, states in page 4 of its response the importance of continuity of access and the need for regular ensemble experiences, it also acknowledges the critical decline of provision within state schools. Unfortunately, this is very true, it can be a challenge to find a state institution to accommodate the study of music at GCSE and A level. I do however question the College's stance on the importance of YRWCMD as a talent pipeline in preparation for undergraduate studies. The majority of young students progressed into professional training, and it is a very narrow view to judge this purely on entry into senior college at RWCMD with no recognition of other training bodies.

The RWCMD is quick to cite its project work, which is laudable in itself, but cannot seriously be seen as any kind of viable alternative and is still inaccessible to many younger musicians, especially those who are at an earlier stage of their musical education.

The College highlights the newly formed Acadami, located at Stanwell School, Penarth, as a 'local, sustainable initiative', in truth, it is, at present, a sticking plaster

for a severed artery. A considerable number of ex RWCMD students attend there, alongside my son, many of whom travel from far afield to access this level of training.

This new provision was pulled into existence within the space of 8 weeks through the amazing efforts of a group of ex RWCMD tutors who, with the help of CF Music Service, have managed to establish an alternative provision that is offering more than just 1-1 lessons, and where talented young musicians can work and develop and collaborate with equally talented peers. It is a delicate, fragile thing at present and deserves support to ensure success. Many who attend are working across split sites, either having piano tuition at Chapter Arts centre and then ensemble work at Stanwell ( as Stanwell is a state school, and although well provisioned, is not in itself equipped for specialist music tuition), or individual tuition elsewhere and chamber or musicianship at Stanwell. The tuition is excellent, but limited. There is no provision for harp or other instruments that were previously on site at RWCMD such as larger percussion or double bass. Many families are not able to access training here (or are having to limit it), due to financial constraints. At present, funding is only available inline with CF Music provision ( FSM and lowest income bracket). For families on modest or median income, there is no assistance.

In a recent BBC article <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cdekn0g7y92o> Principal Gaunt herself calls for an increase in funding for the arts. Although it is somewhat galling to those families so directly impacted by the closure of the junior departments that this rallying cry comes now, instead of as an effort to save the departments from closure before the 'very difficult decision was made', her words speak true, we are on the cusp of losing an entire generation of talent.

More young people have been relegated to become bedroom musicians, isolated from the collaborative cohesion that is needed to thrive. The lack of accessible provision in schools and the wider community, cuts to transport for county ensembles, creative hubs such as Blackwood Miners Institute at threat of closure, all pose a distinct threat to the cultural health of our nation.

In the wake of the pandemic we are facing a mental health and educational engagement crisis amongst our youth, and the stripping of music, drama and dance provision only drives this generation further away from meaningful, societal cohesion and further into loneliness. It is dangerous to consider the performative arts as a non-essential frippery, it is the most basic glue that holds a society together and without funding we are facing it purely being accessible only to the privileged

minority and fuelled by elitism rather than the glorious diversity that Wales encompasses.

Yours sincerely,

Bryony Black,