



8<sup>th</sup> September 2015

The Petitions Committee  
National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff CF99 1NA

Dear Committee Member

**Petition to Protect the Future of Youth Music in Wales**

Thank you, first of all, for your time and efforts and in allowing us to bring this issue into the public domain. Our grateful thanks also for giving us the opportunity of responding to the recent Task and Finish Group report.

We acknowledge that the Task and Finish Group was established and had completed the vast majority if not all of its work before this petition was presented. We ask, therefore, that this additional information is considered in the light of this disparity in timing.

We applaud the fact that the Petitions Committee has made contact with Nick Gibb MP at the Department for Education in order to gain a clearer impression of the situation in England. This was an important step for us as petitioners as the summary in Mr Gibb's letter highlights most of what we are requesting, namely:

- A funding formula for music education, based on pupil numbers, giving equality across all regions.
- The recognition of the additional needs of disadvantaged children in this respect, with corresponding additional funding.
- A ring -fenced budget purely for the work of music services / hubs.

The above information obviously arrived after the Task and Finish Group reported but we still wish this to be considered by the committee as it has the potential to allay many of our current concerns. We had hoped that the Task and Finish Group could have created a means of directing the funding directly to Music Services / hubs where, as financially independent organisations, they would be able to apply for additional funding from bodies such as, for example, the National Lottery. The Task and Finish report appears to have left the funding onus for such musical activities with the Local Authorities once more and even appears to be in favour of charging pupils. In our own area, introducing a greatly inflated charge (as opposed to a nominal contribution) has led to an overall drop of around 40% in the membership of our County Borough ensembles in the last academic year. The current arrangements have already opened up a “postcode lottery” with the level of music provision dependent entirely upon the authority in which individuals reside. The new recommendations do little to change this situation and can do nothing to halt the cuts or charges being imposed by authorities.

At a time when we are being reminded of the importance of raising standards, please consider the devastating effects the cuts are having on the young musicians of Wales. One Welsh authority recently slashed its music budget by around 50%, with the headline being that they had still saved the service. What actually happened was that more than twenty highly qualified and extremely experienced and dedicated staff left the employ of that authority at the end of the summer term. Replacing that level of experience is going to take many years and will certainly have a very negative effect on our current generation. This is just one example. The Minister for Education and Skills has reaffirmed his commitment to improving opportunities for pupils to experience the arts in schools. While we feel that this is good news in the short term (the 5 year plan) we question whether this is the most effective use of funding and also

express concerns as to what happens to the pupils after the proposed “outside providers” have left. A longer term strategy is obviously needed or, we fear, there may be little left to enhance.

In essence, we, as parents, friends and supporters are asking that action is taken now before it is too late. Many of our current parents are past products of the system themselves and constantly remind our staff of how diluted the provision is now when compared to the opportunities they received as pupils. We really cannot allow this to recede any further.

We are sure that you will give this issue your most earnest attention in committee and look forward to hearing from you further.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeff Ryan', written in a cursive style.

**Jeff Ryan**

**President –  
for and behalf of the Friends of Bridgend Youth Music**