

Lynne Neagle AS/MS
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1509
Ein cyf/Our ref LN/00284/25

Carolyn Thomas MS
Chair - Petitions Committee
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff Bay
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31 March 2025

Dear Carolyn,

Petition P-06-1509: Fund music education for future generations in the “land of song”

Thank you for your letter of 4 March, and for the opportunity to provide my comments on the issues highlighted in the above petition, which your Committee has received recently.

I would firstly like to emphasise that the Welsh Government fully recognises the value of music education and indeed has increased its support in this important area, over recent years. In 2022, in line with a Programme for Government commitment, we established the National Music Service, with the aim of supporting children and young people to benefit from opportunities to play a musical instrument, to sing, and to engage in music-making activities.

The progress and impact of the National Music Service is being closely monitored, notably through an ongoing independent evaluation by Arad Research, which is currently at interim stage. Evidence and data indicate that the Service is supporting a major shift in enhancing the approaches to supporting music education and developing joint working with key delivery partners. This in turn is fostering a long-term vision for sustainable and equitable access to quality music education for all children and young people in Wales, regardless of their background

In response to specific areas raised in the petition, I would outline the following points.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The predominant focus of the Service's work is on supporting music in schools, with specific initiatives including 'First Experiences' in primary schools and 'Music Pathways' in secondary schools. In particular, through 'First Experiences', thousands of learners are receiving six weeks of free musical instrument tuition, which is sometimes the first time they have ever participated in music-making activities.

Another important strand of support is the national instrument, resource and equipment library, enabling teachers and music services to obtain access to a wide range of instruments, including specialist and adaptive instruments, to continue to build on the work of the schools' provision and ensure inclusion for all learners. The library also provides instruments to learners who may not be able to afford their own, ensuring that no child is excluded from participating in music activities, both in school and beyond.

By way of some further context on the funding position of the National Music Service, this is operating in its current phase up to the end of March 2025. It is fully funded by the Welsh Government, with the total support over the period 2022-2025 being £13 million, via a grant to the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA). Last December, I announced the new Curriculum for Wales Grant Support Programme, to provide focused support to schools and settings, from April 2025 onwards. This strategic approach to grant-funded curriculum support prioritises the National Music Service for forward funding. The WLGA submitted an application for a new phase of the National Music Service programme under this programme, and this has been assessed in detail by my officials. I am currently considering advice on the outcomes of the appraisals process for the Curriculum for Wales Grant Support Programme, and will be announcing further information on the specific grants and funding allocations awarded under this scheme, very shortly.

Turning to the issue raised about funding for higher education, I recognise that this is a difficult time for the sector in Wales and across the UK as a whole. Many higher education institutions are having to take tough decisions in response to financial challenges, and this is causing uncertainty and anxiety to staff and students affected.

Last month, the Minister for Further and Higher Education announced an additional £18.5m capital funding for this financial year in recognition of the significant financial challenges facing higher education. This additional funding will support universities with estate maintenance and digital projects to reduce operating costs, while also improving environmental sustainability and ensuring that facilities continue to be suitable for providing a high-quality student experience and delivering world-leading research. This funding will be allocated shortly by Medr, the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research.

I am aware also that Cardiff University is currently in a period of statutory consultation on proposals for its academic future, in response to its financial position. One of these proposals is the potential closure of its School of Music. Wales's cultural, arts and sporting sectors make a vital social and economic contribution to our society, enriching our communities and inspiring future generations. Every person in Wales has the right to access, create, participate in, and see themselves reflected in the cultural activity of our nation. Our universities play a key role in facilitating this. The Minister for Further and Higher Education is working with the Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership to understand the potential impact the proposals by Cardiff University may have on the sector.

Since the announcement by Cardiff University, the Minister for Further and Higher Education has met with the Vice-Chancellors of every Welsh university, representatives of Universities and Colleges Union, and the National Union of Students, to further understand the pressures facing the sector and explore how the Welsh Government can provide support through this difficult period. The Minister has also held a roundtable discussion with Vice-Chancellors of universities in Wales, leadership of Universities Wales, and the Chief

Executive of Medr, with discussion looking at potential steps to work towards a long-term more sustainable footing for the higher education sector.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lynne Neagle'.

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Cabinet Secretary for Education