

Wales is Rapidly Losing its Musical Reputation and Heritage

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 11 Mehefin 2019

Petitions Committee | 11 June 2019

Research Briefing:

Petition number: P-05-880

Petition title: Wales is Rapidly Losing its Musical Reputation and Heritage

Text of petition: We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to produce an urgent National Plan for Music Education with dedicated central funding in line with the rest of the UK. This will ensure that affordable musical instrument and vocal tuition is available as a right for all children in Wales.

- The Music Services in Wales are integral to the development of Music Education as part of the creative curriculum across all domains.
- The contribution made by the Music Industry and Music Services to the economy and the well-being of the people of Wales is too important to ignore.
- Young people in Wales studying music at A-level has halved in 10 years while GCSE entries have fallen by 40%.
- Austerity is not an excuse for the Welsh Government to allow the decline of Music Services. Austerity should be the reason to invest in the equality of access for all and the sustainability of our communities.

1. Background

While music is currently a subject in the national curriculum, music services are intended to support and enhance the teaching of music in schools by providing children and young people with opportunities to learn a wide range of instruments, to develop singing and to perform in ensembles, choirs, and other groups, on school premises, in the wider community, and at regional and national level. Extra-curricular instrumental and vocal tuition is delivered by peripatetic staff, outside lessons but during school hours.

The provision and funding of non-statutory music services is the responsibility of local authorities. Welsh Government funding is supplied through the Revenue Support Grant, and authorities make decisions based on their local priorities.

2. Welsh Government Action

Against the background of pressures on local authority music service budgets, the Music Services Task and Finish Group was established in March 2015 by Huw Lewis, then Minister for Education and Skills. The [Report of the task and finish group on music services in Wales](#) [PDF 539KB] was published in July 2015. The report provided a snapshot of music services across Wales and highlighted the challenges to continued delivery of high quality music services. This included sustaining and developing high quality music services provision in the context of reduction in school and local authority budgets and of competing priorities. There have been two progress reports, [Music services task and finish group: one year on](#) [PDF 362KB](April 2017) and [Music services task and finish group: final progress report](#) [PDF 541KB]

As set out in the Minister for Education's letter to the Committee, the Welsh Government has provided an additional £3m over the years 2018–19 to 2019–20 to support music service provision.

3. Assembly activity

Previous Petition

In June 2015, the Petitions Committee considered a petition ([P-04-637 To Protect the Future of Youth Music in Wales](#)) from Friends of Bridgend Youth Music which asked the National Assembly to urge the Welsh Government to protect musical tuition in schools and in particular to:

- Reinstatement of central ring-fencing of budgets for professional instrumental tuition in schools;
- Implement a national strategy to reverse the decline of Youth Music in Wales;
- Offer the children and young people of Wales their right to receive an education that develops their unique personalities, talents and abilities to the full.

After correspondence with the Minister for Education, the WLGA and WJEC, the Committee considered there was nothing further they could do to take the issue forward. The petition was closed in 2016.

Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee Inquiry

Following a public vote, the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee undertook an inquiry into funding for and access to music education. Their report, [Hitting the Right Note](#) [PDF 1MB] was published in June 2018. The Committee's overarching recommendation was that the Welsh Government should transfer responsibility for the delivery of music services to an arms-length, national body which should be core funded by the Welsh

Government. [The Welsh Government accepted this recommendation in principle](#), subject to the outcome of a feasibility study to identify and assess options for delivery of music services.

The Committee also recommended that the Welsh Government should prepare a National Action Plan for Music. While the Welsh Government rejected the recommendation, the Minister for Education agreed that she would extend the feasibility study to examine creation of a plan for music education (rather than music in general).

In her letter to the Committee, the Minister confirms that a contract has been awarded to undertake the feasibility study, and the study will include whether there should be a National Plan for Music Education.

4. Provision in England and Scotland

England

In November 2011, the Department for Education and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport published, [The Importance of Music, A National Plan for Music](#). The Government stated that the aims of the national plan were to enable children from all backgrounds and every part of England to have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument; to make music with others; to learn to sing; and to have the opportunity to progress in developing their musical abilities.

The national plan for music applies to all schools including academies and free schools and it remains part of the current Government's music education policy. The national plan will run until 2020.

Following an application process run by Arts Council England, 123 music education hubs were appointed and began work in September 2012. Hubs are federations of local organisations with an interest in music education. They may include schools and other educational organisations, as well as arts and music organisations. The Department for Education said that the function of music education hubs would be to 'improve the quality and consistency of music education across England both in and out of school'.

Music education hubs receive funding from several different sources. They receive central government funding allocated according to a formula which reflects total pupil numbers and the number of pupils in each area who are eligible for free school meals. Arts Council England operates as the fund holder on behalf of the Department for Education for this central funding. In the 2018/19 financial year, the Department for Education provided £75 million of funding to music education hubs.

The second largest contributor to music education hubs' budgets were schools. The third largest contribution in 2018/19 to music education hubs' budgets was from parents. Local authority grants and contributions signified a much smaller proportion of music education hub funding.

Scotland

In Scotland, instrumental music tuition is considered by local authorities to be a discretionary service separate and complementary to the music curriculum, a similar position to that in Wales. Each local authority manages its own Instrumental Music Service and each is able to set its own fees (if any), hire charges for instruments and, where charges apply, any exemptions or concessionary rates. The Scottish Parliament published a report, [A note of concern: The future of instrumental music tuition in schools](#) in January 2019. The report noted that

The Committee respects the democratic right of local authorities to take decisions about local expenditure and acknowledge the financial choices they face. However, the Committee believes in principle that music tuition should be provided free of charge in every local authority.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.