

The refreshed National Plan for Music Education was scheduled to be published in Autumn 2020 but was delayed due to the pandemic, then expected in Spring of this year and finally released just over a week ago. The government ran a Call for Evidence from 9 February to 13 March 2020 which was intended to 'seek views on music education to inform proposals for a refreshed national plan for music education.' Yet, despite the Department for Education's claims that views were being sought on how the National Plan should be revised, the Call for Evidence contained no such questions. It also made it clear that the refreshed Plan would not address the wider policy impacts such as funding or assessment.

At the ISM, we felt there was a lack of transparency surrounding the drafting of the refreshed Plan and were concerned about a lack of meaningful consultation with music teachers on its content, especially as music education had been so dramatically impacted by the pandemic since the Call for Evidence. The questions in the Call for Evidence also had a narrow focus and failed to ask teachers how the National Plan could be revised. Most importantly, a government press release from 9 February 2020 states, 'The responses [to the Call for Evidence] and experiences put forward will help inform changes to the Plan which will then be fully consulted on.'

In order to establish the situation of music education in schools as COVID restrictions were fully lifted and to help shape the thinking of the DfE and the refreshed Plan, the ISM ran a survey of classroom and peripatetic music teachers between November 2021 and January 2022. The survey gathered teachers' opinions on the current music education provision in English schools (both curricular and extra-curricular), the impact of the English Baccalaureate and Progress 8 accountability measures and their ideas on what should be included in the refreshed National Plan. Over 500 primary, secondary and peripatetic music teachers from all types of settings responded to the survey. The findings confirmed that inequality in music education in England, which the original National Plan was meant to address, still exists – in classroom and instrumental provision, in Senior Leadership support, in the type of schools pupils attend and, most starkly, in funding.

Teachers' responses revealed a shocking picture of inequality in music provision across the sectors. The most varied experiences were in primary schools, where provision ranged from 'virtually none' to weekly classroom lessons for all pupils with a specialist music teacher, complemented by whole class ensemble teaching, multiple ensembles and a full range of peripatetic instrumental lessons. Despite COVID-19 restrictions being lifted in schools in July 2021, primary school music provision in particular is struggling to recover. Some respondents reported that extra-curricular activities or group singing had not resumed, or that numbers attending were greatly diminished.

Secondary teachers reported that the Key Stage 3 curriculum continues to be narrowed either through placing music on a carousel or rota system with other subjects, or through shortening Key Stage 3 from three years to two years. Peripatetic teachers, many of whom worked in a range of schools, echoed the experiences of their classroom colleagues and also highlighted the issues surrounding instrumental and vocal lesson uptake, which directly affects their income. In some cases, COVID had impacted the numbers of pupils learning an instrument but more often the cost was the greatest barrier preventing pupils taking lessons.

Our data showed a vast difference in departmental budgets for music, ranging from £0 to £100,000, with clear differences between school types. Respondents from Independent schools received over four times the departmental funding of academies and free schools, and over five times the amount of maintained schools. The mean yearly budget in maintained schools was £1,865, in academies and free schools it was £2,152, and in independent schools, £9,917. Overall, 61% of respondents said that their budget was insufficient and teachers reported low per-pupil spending and significant budget cuts, which they felt was limiting the learning of pupils and stifling department growth.

Many teachers told us that they raised additional funds through concerts or paid for items themselves. This was often to supplement budgets that covered only basic costs such as stationery. Most teachers do not receive additional pay for extra-curricular activities, or for the time required to plan and deliver concerts.

In these cases, they are essentially working for free to raise additional money for their departments.

Many music departments did not have an allocated budget. In these cases, teachers had to request funding to cover what was needed and hope that the requests would be approved. Teachers also expressed frustration regarding a lack of IT investment, and the associated costs for updated equipment and software, as well as not being able to offer a full range of opportunities for their pupils. Many reported a desire to buy in workshops or visits from professional musicians, but their budget did not allow for this.

Overall, 93% of respondents said that accountability measures such as the EBacc and/or Progress 8 had caused harm to the provision of music education. Teachers told us that these accountability measures had led to a decline in the uptake of KS4 and post-16 courses, impacted option choices, and devalued music as a subject. Teachers reported fewer pupils taking GCSE or BTEC music, sometimes resulting in courses being dropped from the curriculum completely. This had a knock-on effect on A-level provision, with one teacher stating that no secondary schools in their city offered A-level music. It also impacts the workforce, with music teachers' hours decreasing if KS4 and post-16 courses do not run.

When asked how they would like to see the National Plan revised, seven clear themes emerged. These were increased, ring-fenced funding, addressing the narrowing of the curriculum and reforming the EBacc, supporting the workforce both in and out of the classroom, giving the subject a higher profile and increasing its value, more diverse and accessible provision, consultation with current teachers, and for it to be realistic to deliver.

Many teachers commented that without adequate funding, the contents of the refreshed Plan would be largely irrelevant. Peripatetic teachers felt strongly that instrumental and vocal lessons should be free or heavily subsidised for all pupils, to ensure that cost was not a barrier to learning. Teachers also felt that the National Plan should include clear expectations that music should not be taught on a carousel system, and that a three-year KS3 should be reinstated in all

schools. Many called for the Plan to mandate this level of provision, including a minimum of one hour a week of classroom music, believing that the current guidance should be made statutory. A large number also wanted to see music included in the EBacc and a few called for the EBacc to be scrapped completely.

There were strong views on support for the music education workforce. Teachers felt that there should be more specialist classroom music teachers, particularly in primary schools, but at the least more time dedicated to music in primary teacher education courses. Ongoing support through CPD to develop confidence and skills was also a feature of responses, alongside a recognition that teachers in single-person departments also needed support. Peripatetic teachers wanted to see an end to zero-hours contracts, and better protection for their pay and conditions. Many teachers felt that music was not valued enough by the government and that other subjects were often given higher priority by parents, teachers, senior leaders and sometimes pupils themselves. Some believed that music should also play a more prominent role in Ofsted inspections, suggesting that schools should not receive the top gradings unless they provided a high-quality music offer.

Some teachers stated that that the current curriculum and Plan were not inclusive or diverse enough, with too much emphasis on classical music. Widening the genres and including more technology were suggested as ways to address this. Some felt that the refreshed Plan needs to be more relevant to disadvantaged pupils and those from different cultural backgrounds. Teachers strongly believed that the refreshed Plan needs to be realistic. This was both in terms of recognising the lived experiences of teachers in a range of settings, and in terms of what could be delivered in the time available, with the resources at hand. Many respondents wanted the refreshed Plan to include a wider age range, particularly early years, as well as greater emphasis on supporting pupils with additional needs, all of which received minimal coverage in the original Plan.

It is great to see so much of what we, and the music teachers in our survey, have been calling for reflected in the new National Plan. We are particularly pleased that so many of our recommendations from our reports have been

adopted. We are thankful to both the Government and the Expert Panel who have clearly worked incredibly hard to deliver it. We will monitor its impact carefully, celebrate the positives but also unashamedly keep on talking about the wider issues that impact on music education which were out of the scope of the refreshed Plan such as funding and accountability measures.