

## Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

**Petition Number:** [PE1694](#)

**Main Petitioner:** Ralph Riddiough

**Subject:** Free musical instrument services

Calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to change the law to ensure that musical instrument tuition is available as of right to all children attending state schools in Scotland who wish it, free of charge.

### Background

Musical instrument tuition is an 'extra-curricular' service for which many local authorities charge fees. There has been concern over a number of years about local authorities' charging policies and reductions in staffing. This year concern about budget cuts has been particularly high profile.

The Improvement Service run an annual survey of instrumental music services. The [2017 survey](#) reported that the numbers of pupils taking lessons has remained steady over the past five years and that there was no correlation between numbers of pupils taking lessons and the fees charged. It noted that:

"... this does not mean that the costs of fees do not influence parents' decision as to whether pupils partake in lessons"

The report found that fees charges covered between 2% and 58% of the cost of the service. It also found that the number of FTE music instructor posts was 640.6 in 2016/17 compared to 660 the previous year.

The Music Education Partnership Group (representing organisations with an interest in music education) found that around two thirds of local authorities charge on a means tested basis and one third do not charge. They will publish research on the issue in early 2019.

The EIS support the petition and has a campaign '[change the tune](#)' to protest at budget cuts to music services.

### Scottish Government Action

In response to concerns about local authorities' increasing fees this year, the Scottish Government was reported in the Scotsman (2 June) as saying:

"While respecting the autonomy of local councils, Scottish Ministers have committed to working in collaboration with partners to find solutions that help ensure instrumental music remains accessible to all."

The Herald reported (2 June) that John Swinney MSP has agreed to discuss the future of the service with local authorities and members of the Music Education Partnership Group.

Music education has been a concern for a number of years. In 2012, the Scottish Government established the [Instrumental Music Group](#) to examine fee charging policies and to make recommendations. An implementation group was formed in 2013 to oversee the progress on recommendations. They [reported in 2015](#) and [guidance was published](#) in 2016.

### **Scottish Parliament Action**

The Education and Skills Committee will be considering the issue of music education following correspondence from EIS, the Music Education Partnership Group, the EIS and Ronan Watson. The correspondence is [available on the Committee's website](#).

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**Senior Researcher**  
**7 June 2018**

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