

PE1694/Z

EIS submission of 5 November 2018

Summary

The EIS welcomes the opportunity to comment on petition PE1694, which is calling on the Scottish 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.

We are commenting from the perspective of teachers (over 80% of teachers in Scotland are members of the EIS). We have around 350 Instrumental Music Teacher (IMT) members, and an active IMT Network. We also have a long-standing interest in the arts and culture as a means of enriching the lives of Scotland's children; the EIS donates 0.5% of its subscription income annually to sponsorship of the arts in Scotland, regularly supporting music festivals.

We strongly support this petition. Instrumental Music should be free to all children who wish to take part.

This submission focuses on four main points:

1. the **catastrophic impact of recent charging decisions** taken by local authorities and the misalignment between recent decisions and the 'excellence and equity' agenda;
2. the **benefits of music education**, for individuals and society;
3. the **way in which instrumental music provision has been unfairly and wrongly characterised by some as 'extra-curricular'** and has been disadvantaged as a result; and
4. the **need now for urgent action** to resolve the matter, given the worsening crisis, and its impact on our members and across society.

Recent decisions – excellence and equity?

Our Instrumental Music Teachers' Network met in the first week of October 2018 and shared updates on developments in their local authorities. That network has representatives from across Scotland. Their updates were deeply concerning¹. To give you a flavour of what was discussed:

- Edinburgh is anticipating a potential budget cut, which would mean a 50% reduction in IMT staff and 2,500 fewer pupils able to access the service
- West Lothian has introduced charges of £354 per year (it was previously a non-charging authority) and it was reported that subsequently 1,300 pupils who were previously learning an instrument have dropped out of the service; it was further reported that one instructor alone has lost 78% of their pupils

¹ Please note that these reports were based on the current picture in early Oct 2018 as observed by members of our IMT Network; we know that the situation is fluid. We have raised FOI queries to gather definitive data on drop-out rates in authorities which have introduced new charges.

- South Ayrshire has introduced a £200 charge, and has reportedly lost between a third and a quarter of pupils; in some primary schools there is now no child learning to play a musical instrument
- Perth and Kinross has seen a progressive dropping off as charges have risen and a 50% rise in applications for charitable support to take part in music education
- East Lothian has introduced charges of £280, and from 1,500 learners, only around one third have registered to continue; 3 FTE IMTs who left have not been replaced; instruments have not been funded and so many children who are paying for lessons have had no instrument provided yet on which to learn
- Midlothian has seen 2/3 of pupils who were learning musical instruments drop out of the service since introducing charges of £205 per year; and those pupils who remain in the service are choosing disciplines that involve no instrument costs (e.g. singing rather than violin)
- Clackmannanshire has lost 74 pupils from its service since introducing charges of £524 per year (an increase of 103% in the charge); about half of paying parents have reportedly said that they would pay for one year only but couldn't sustain this in the longer-term, so further drop-off is expected.

This is just a snapshot of some of the impacts that the current inequitable approach to music provision in schools is having. We trust that the Petitions Committee will agree that it is alarming to hear of children dropping out of music lessons in such great numbers. We would point out this will inevitably mean fewer bands, orchestras, and other such ensembles being sustainable in schools, and fewer learning opportunities being available as a result.

It is hard to see how this aligns with the agenda to pursue 'excellence and equity' across the Scottish education system that the Scottish Government has articulated over recent years. We would ask, where is the equity in vastly disparate charging policies? How can excellence be enhanced when music education faces continual devastating cuts? Is it equitable that 'who pays, plays'?

We would argue that rather than striving to enhance excellence and equity, it appears that many local authorities are reducing young people's opportunities and increasing inequality. This cannot continue.

The benefits of music education

Music education has significant worth, which we believe has been undervalued. Learning to play a musical instrument has intrinsic value, but it also leads to significant cognitive, social and emotional benefits for learners, and the development of lifelong skills. In an era of increasing concern about young people's mental health, the wellbeing benefits of music participation must be recognised; its role in supporting enhanced attainment must also be closely considered by the Scottish Parliament.

There is a vast amount of evidence of the value of studying and playing music. A literature review by Prof. Sue Hallam of the University of London's Institute of Education reports that *“engagement with music plays a major role in developing perceptual processing systems which facilitate the encoding and identification of speech sounds and patterns”*; and *“active engagement with music can improve mathematical performance”*.

A 2016 study on music and attainment found that young people (aged 11-16) playing an instrument showed greater progress and better academic outcomes than those not playing, with the greatest impact for those playing the longest.

Dr Rachel Drury, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, reported in her 2015 paper, 'The wider benefits of instrumental music learning in childhood', that *“Benefits to literacy, numeracy, cognition, spatial-temporal reasoning, fine motor coordination and physical and mental wellbeing, and even the amount of grey matter in the brain, have all been linked with learning to play a musical instrument.”*

EIS members have observed, and actively contribute to, the very wide range of benefits to pupils gained from learning a musical instrument, including increased confidence, improved organisational skills, enhanced literacy and numeracy, the development of collaboration skills and increased focus and concentration.

Learning and playing an instrument also increases children's happiness, and aligns closely with the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence, particularly those related to confidence and contribution.

Instrumental music as a curricular endeavour

Learning an instrument should not be characterised as 'extra-curricular'; this thinking has contributed to under-investment in music education.

Instrumental Music Teachers deliver education during the school day, often in support of National Qualifications. For some courses e.g. Higher Music, performance constitutes 60% of the assessment. Pupils perform their examinable instrumental pieces best with input from highly skilled, professional instrumental music teachers. IMTs also contribute to SQA qualifications by, for example, sourcing and researching materials; rehearsing with or accompanying learners in rehearsals/exams; and composing/arranging/transposing music for use during lessons, performances, and practical examinations.

The EIS firmly believes that universal comprehensive education is a public good and therefore should be delivered as a public service free at the point of use, and that charging for aspects of education is incompatible with the principles of comprehensive education. Instrumental music education should be publicly-funded and all children should be entitled to this learning, free of charge. The scenario which all too commonly exists whereby children who are taking music qualifications are prioritised in terms of access to tuition over those who are not is unsatisfactory. The requisite numbers of skilled, qualified instrumental music teachers should be recruited to meet the ambition of all children and young people, who wish to do so, being able to enjoy the benefits of learning an instrument. Clearly, this will require significant investment to enable the expansion of this highly valuable service. It is a

false economy, which only serves to diminish the service. Instrumental music services should be fully funded by ring-fenced expenditure in order that the creation of a free service is not provided at the expense of existing jobs.

The case for urgent action

It was encouraging to hear at an EIS liaison meeting with the Deputy First Minister on 19 June 2018 that he shares the concerns of the EIS and others about the status of music education and widely variable approaches to provision in local authorities across Scotland. That he was at that stage in talks with COSLA about a way forward was a promising development.

Five months later, however, we are heading into another round of local authority budget setting processes, and the situation appears unchanged. There have been no announcements about any progress.

We would argue that urgent action is needed because:

- children are falling away from the service in large numbers because of the introduction of charging regimes/ increased fees
- ensembles across Scotland will cease to exist if this continues, denying children a valuable learning opportunity
- some music disciplines may die off as learners opt out of studies with a cost attached (preferring e.g. singing to violin)
- instrumental music teacher wellbeing and morale is at an all-time low – it causes high levels of stress working for services which are continually under threat
- the recruitment and retention of skilled qualified teachers is harmed by cuts to Instrumental Music provision
- Scottish cultural life will be seriously affected over the medium and long term by continued erosion of music education.

Member testimony

Members have told us how difficult the current climate is. For example,

“One of my pupils was devastated to have to stop clarinet lessons due to the implementation of charges.” (Member from a charging authority in the West of Scotland)

“I have managed to keep my daughter taking lessons but if the fees increase I will have to stop. I am the main breadwinner and my job no longer feels secure. I find this devastating as my instrument has been something that I have turned to personally when dealing with family crises.” (Member and parent in a charging authority (prefers us not to disclose area))

“Our Saturday morning orchestras, which have been running for over 30 years, are being scrapped” (Member from a charging authority in the South of Scotland)

We urge the Petitions Committee to press the Scottish Government to take urgent action to show that it values music education and values instrumental music teachers.

