



The Petitions Committee

Welsh Government

Cardiff Bay

Cardiff CF99 1NA

Dear Committee Member

Petition to Protect the Future of Youth Music in Wales

Thank you for allowing this petition to be reconsidered once more. On behalf of the Friends of Bridgend Youth Music, I make the following observations:

1. We were, for some reason, unable to access the link to the Creative Learning Plan, and having only a very basic overview of the initiative, we all applauded the fact that the Minister has identified pupil creativity as an area for development. We did, however, have misgivings about the long term prospects for this. We were, obviously, unable to establish exactly what would happen at the end of the five year plan. As this is not the first initiative of its type, we did, however, consider other similar models. The GEST- funded Music Development Fund, launched by the Westminster Government at the turn of the millennium, was a short term project focussing on pupils' right to receive instrumental tuition. This was extremely successful, but upon removal of its funding it served only to leave young people without the level of instrumental tuition they had previously received. There were, fortunately, exceptions in areas where the local authorities saw its value and continued to fund tuition. C anSing, a similar Welsh Government initiative intended to increase standards in singing and based on an English model, (Sing Up!), also had a

limited shelf life while receiving a great deal of public funding to support it. It relied heavily on support from Music Service managers (authorities left it to them to deal with) and their success in getting schools to participate in the work. Once again, what happens when the activities cease? We wish to ascertain, therefore, whether any decision been made as to the long term outcomes at the end of the five years?

2. We were a little surprised at the Task and Finish Group's response to "Hub" working. Whatever term is used for of this type of service, we were really looking at it as a way of making efficiency savings by having less services (and managers) covering a larger area, not unlike the current local authority reorganisation being considered by the Welsh Government. Members of the Task and Finish Group with responsibility for running LA Music Services have been quite active in working with other authorities. Neath Port Talbot and Swansea had always retained a joint music service post 1996 and went on to collaborate with Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion when consortia were established. Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan, likewise, run a joint service as does Gwynedd/Ynys Môn and the former Gwent area. The former Mid Glamorgan area, while running separate services, still collaborates for more ambitious projects. This must surely point to collaborative or hub working having some value.
3. We were concerned that, perhaps, the Minister was not made fully aware of the reasons behind us setting up the petition in the first place. It is true that Local Authorities hold the purse strings to Music Services and this was where many issues arose. In our own authority the Director completely removed the funding for LA ensembles. It is now down to parents paying £5 per pupil per week and to the Friends of Bridgend Youth Music constantly fund-raising that allows this to keep going. There have been consequences, however. The team of 19 staff has reduced to nine and many ensembles have been axed. However hard The Friends try we cannot escape the fact that many families cannot afford to pay these sums and, as a consequence, pupil numbers have dropped by about 40% in just over a year. The centrally-held budget which paid for staffing and for instruments issued to schools was, some years ago devolved to schools where, in theory, it has been protected. This has been a positive move in that some schools have used their own budgets to expand their provision. Some schools have made a small charge to pupils in order to expand their overall provision in different ways. However, there is now evidence of schools charging for lessons so that the music funding can be used to prop up other areas of their budgets or where it is simply creamed off for other uses. The team of 22 staff has now dropped to 14 and is without a specialist music manager. Instrumental teaching staff appointments have been frozen in line with authority generic HR guidelines. These rules do not, on the other hand, apply to school-based teachers in the same way. As a result schools are having to look to other agencies and individuals for tuition when the service is no longer able to provide expertise in

particular areas. Self-employed staff are becoming commonplace now and the authority has no quality control over these people.

4. In order to raise standards at the higher end, it has been necessary since 1996 to collaborate with neighbouring authorities to create Four Counties Youth orchestras and bands. This has until recently been subsidised by each authority contributing a percentage to a central budget based on pupil population. Our own authority, which regularly provides a large number of performers to each ensemble, has now removed this subsidy. Fortunately this is covered by a well know automotive manufacturer and a local car dealership. Without this about sixty pupils per annum from our area would be unable to access these ensembles and corresponding national ensembles. (Entry to many national ensembles is conditional on membership of these county ensembles). It already costs the parents of each child taking part in these activities somewhere in the region of £375 per annum, not including national ensemble fees to fund subsidised activities. If these subsidies disappear then that closes down opportunities for many pupils.
5. We are fully aware of the diminishing budgets and accept that cuts are inevitable. We are asking merely that consideration is given to the fact that decisions made have the potential to destroy decades of excellent work. As stated on many occasions, Wales had the world's first National Youth Orchestra and Glamorgan had the UK's first County Youth Orchestra. The demise of both is almost becoming a reality. It seems that the WJEC, which manages the National Youth Orchestra on behalf of the twenty two authorities is now likely to reduce by half the staff who manage this organisation in the coming months. Please consider the future of our young people. These are all well established, long –term initiatives which we feel need careful consideration.

Yours Sincerely



Jeff Ryan

President

On behalf of the Friends of Bridgend Youth Music