

MEC newsletter January 2022

2021 was another eventful and challenging year for the music education sector. The Music Education Council Trustees reflect on recent developments in music education, as well as priorities for 2022.

Phil Castang, MEC Chair and Director of Creative Learning and Engagement, Bristol Music Trust

Music and climate change

MEC's recent Music and Climate Change Seminar may have seemed to some, like a significant departure from our usual focus. Climate change is relevant to all sectors of business and society and is not something separate. Cutting carbon emissions that result from bands touring, audience travel and powering events is clearly the biggest challenge for the industry. It was announced recently that the music industry is pledging to cut carbon emissions to net zero by 2050.

As music education is very much part of the music industry, and there is significant overlap in our aims and ambitions, it is vital that those of us working across the music education sector make similar commitments. At MEC's Music and Climate Change Seminar, we heard from Steven Greenall, CEO of Warwick Music. He spoke about their carbon neutral pBone instruments, and how the instrument manufacturing sector is taking steps to reduce carbon emissions. There is significant work to do, but there is reason to be optimistic. MEC's Music and Climate Change Seminar showed how important it is to sit together at the same table to discuss and solve complex problems in a spirit of collaboration. If you missed it, you can watch the seminar back.

Training and workforce representation

At the November ISM Trust conference 'Where to next for music education?', I spoke about my hopes for the revised National Plan for Music Education. Before I reeled off a list of hopes, I stated, 'We need a well-trained, valued (financially), representative workforce to deliver all the points I'm going to mention. In my view, there should be a completely separate plan for creating a supportive rewarding career for self-employed and employed instrumental/singing music teachers. Training and workforce representation is a big issue'.

A recurring topic of the conference was workers' rights – the spotlight was shone on the increasing prevalence of zero-hours contracts and the concerning casualisation of the workforce. The ISM is also currently waiting on an important Supreme Court decision on holiday pay, which may affect thousands of music teachers.

I spent many years as a peripatetic teacher, driving miles to visit 3 or 4 schools each day, teaching in windowless rooms, eating lunch in the car, and feeling like an alien in the staff room. It was a very isolated job, and the hours extended way beyond what I was paid to do. The pay and conditions for peripatetic teachers were not great back in the mid-1990s, but they are significantly worse now.

The MU/NEU Charter for Visiting Music Teachers goes some way towards setting out some of the functional considerations, however, my feeling is that we need something much more radical. We need a unified national commitment to supporting peripatetic music teachers that the whole sector can sign-up to. This would include national hourly rates for teaching, performing, planning and other non-contact time work, it could also include peer mentoring schemes and regional best practice networks. It would be nice to see the ISM and MU join together and take a lead on this work in the best interests of the teaching profession.

Great expectations

A revised National Plan for Music Education will be published this year. Many of us have had a love/hate relationship with the original plan. Personally, I never regarded the NPME as the totality of what must be done. I always regarded it as a framework on which to build, a starting point. I won't miss 2021, and I look forward to new challenges in 2022. Wishing you all the best for the New Year.

Philip Flood, MEC Honorary Secretary and Director, Sound Connections

Back in November, I was asked to speak at the Westminster Education Forum's policy conference, 'Next steps for music education in England and implementing the new curriculum'. I was on the final panel, 'Music in schools and the wider creative sector - supporting young musicians, creating a talent pipeline, and widening access to musical career pathways'. As with almost everything over the last 18 months, the event was online, with around 80 attendees.

There had been a lot of noise on Twitter prior to the event, which has made me reflect on events such as these. The cost is significant, although there are concessions, the list of speakers is very similar to the last conference (which I also spoke at), and the attendees were also mostly the same as other events that I have been at. Also, and most significantly, there was a total lack of diversity, both in speakers and attendees. It all just felt like an echo chamber, with little sense of action and momentum. I'm now considering what to do next if a similar opportunity arises.

At Sound Connections, we work hard to give others the space for their voices to be heard. Power sharing, equity, diversity, and inclusion are core values which run through the charity. We try and live and breathe these through what we do and how we do it. As a white, middle-aged man I need to step aside and give others the opportunity to speak at events like these and so will be actively doing this from now on. I will be stepping down as a trustee of MEC at the next AGM so that a new voice can be heard on the board.

I'm also going to be thinking about what more we can all do to bring in other voices, to move beyond the echo chamber, and to share any power that we might have to ensure that any future events fully represent the rich diversity that I know makes up the fabulous music education sector that I've been privileged to work in over the last 30 years.

I look forward to working with the MEC membership on this, and please do contact me if you have any thoughts – philip@sound-connections.org.uk.

Michelle James – MEC Treasurer, CEO of Sing Up and Trustee, Sing Up Foundation

Music and recovery

In November, a document was published by the Department for Education entitled Teaching a broad and balanced curriculum for education recovery.

It is a set of non-statutory guidance for teachers and leaders in reception and key stages 1, 2 and 3 who are responsible for the curriculum and its teaching, and offers suggestions to help schools decide how to prioritise elements within their curriculum for education recovery. Among its 'guiding principles' it says: 'Taking the planned, sequenced curriculum as a starting point, you should prioritise teaching missed content that will allow pupils to make sense of later work in the curriculum. This includes key knowledge, skills, vocabulary, concepts, and the links between concepts.'

It includes a section on music, in which the first suggestion is that 'schools may wish to refer to the Model Music Curriculum' and makes clear that this is non-statutory guidance intended to help teach music.

One issue that has begun to emerge in relation to using the Model Music Curriculum – particularly after an extended and unforeseen break in normal lessons in school because of the pandemic – is that some teachers are unclear how to make the leap from where their pupils are, to the level the MMC aspires for them at each stage of their learning. Teachers are understandably struggling to see how they can overcome this gap, on top of which they may also be struggling to make the case for musical learning being a priority when there is so much emphasis on helping pupils to 'catch up' with lost learning in English, Maths and Science.

There's also a disconnect between pupils' needs in relation to recovery and wellbeing and their readiness to learn. Recovery Curriculum support materials, which are widely available now to schools, focus on addressing the key themes of routine, structure, friendship, opportunity and freedom. While the DfE's 'Broad and balanced curriculum' document mentions the wellbeing and community benefits of resuming ensemble activities, as a sector we know very well that participation in any well-led music making at school benefits pupils' well-being in multiple ways – inclusion, self-esteem, self-expression, creativity, confidence – being just some of them. I wonder how many schools have made the connection between use of the Recovery Premium and music's extra-curricular role in recovery for pupils.

If we focus only on the losses caused by the pandemic - what we have been deprived of, the restrictions we've adapted to, the missed time with friends and family – we might be missing some important and life-affirming positives. Pupils too will have experienced all these things and have their own stories to share and reflect on. Wouldn't it be great to give them some creative space in which to do this, and to give a voice to all their thoughts and feelings? Perhaps it is essential we help them to do this before expecting them to launch straight back into learning.

Recovery curriculum resources:

- [Reset, recover, rebuild: a roadmap for recovery](#)
- [What is a recovery curriculum and how can primary schools implement it?](#)
- [A Recovery Curriculum: Loss and Life for our children and schools post pandemic.](#)

Richard Jones – MEC Trustee

Levelling up at lunchtime

Schools are shortening lunchtimes and this is having an impact on music making. Why are they doing this? Is it to minimise behavioural issues or cut costs as they do not have to employ so many supervisors, or maybe give free lunches as 'recompense' for those running activities? Don't call lunchtime, a break the professional associations fought for, and perhaps you can use teachers to supervise. Finally, shortening lunch shortens the school day and maybe saves on utilities bills.

COVID too is having an impact. English schools are required to submit daily attendance figures to the DfE, and it estimated that 3.2% of all pupils – around 248,000 children – were not in class for reasons connected to coronavirus on 21 October. The latest guidance requires students in secondary schools to wear masks in social areas.

It is therefore understandable that schools are taking public health measures to protect all on site. However, the schools COVID-19 operational guidance issued on 27 September states:

'We no longer recommend that it is necessary to keep children in consistent groups ('bubbles'). This means that 'bubbles' will not need to be used in schools. As well as enabling flexibility in curriculum delivery, this means that assemblies can resume and you no longer need to make alternative arrangements to avoid mixing at lunch.'

However, some schools have maintained bubbles meaning that mixed year ensembles cannot happen regardless of the length of the break. Could this be this having a disproportionate impact on vulnerable children? Lunchtime gives music departments access to a 'captive' audience and one school reports that not one single Pupil Premium child is attending after-school activities where they were participating at lunchtime.

Restricting extra-curricular activity to after school means that choice is lessened for Music, Drama, PE departments will all be vying for the students who are known to do it all, but with activity limited to five slots instead of ten choices will be made and no matter how compelling the offer standards could drop. I used to say to PE colleagues that they could always find another centre forward, but 2nd oboes are not easy to find!

But surely lunchtime should be about ethos, character building and fun? Not every student will want to join a club, some will want to just run around or go to the library or just hang out? Unwittingly, schools that shorten the lunchtime may well be limiting the musical potential of their students.

Emma Lines, MEC Trustee and Senior Programme Manager, Drake Music Scotland

Music education update from Scotland

The below information was taken from John Wallace's (Convenor of the Music Education Partners Group) presentation at the Scottish Parliament Cross-Party Group on Music on 7th December 2021.

Free music tuition in Scotland

The Improvement Service's recent National Instrumental Music Survey 2021 report demonstrated that in 2020/21 41,594 pupils participated in instrumental music tuition provided by local authorities in Scotland. This represents a very large decrease of 14,604 pupils (26%) from the total number in 2019/20 and demonstrates the hugely disruptive impact that COVID-19 restrictions have had on these services. However, these figures were collected in June 2021. As always there is a time drag on collating, analysing, and publication. I'm happy to report that there has been a huge rebound since the introduction of free tuition in Scotland in August 2021, and the numbers are currently back to where they were before the pandemic and many instrumental services are oversubscribed and struggling to cope with the demand. So there are grounds for optimism!

Music Education in the Primary Classroom in Scotland

In December 2021, a research report entitled Music Education in the Primary Classroom in Scotland was published by the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. The project aims were to gather background data on general music education in primary classrooms provided by non-specialist primary teachers, as well as to explore the content of music education in primary school-focused initial teacher Education (ITE) programmes.

Discover more research findings on the Music Education Partnership Group website

SEND/Additional Support Needs research study

Kelly-Jo Foster-Peters is working on a research study on SEND and Additional Support Needs music education partnerships. Originally this study only targeted music hubs in England, but has now opened up the research to local authorities in Scotland. The aim of the research is to transform future partnerships to improve quality and sustainability for the benefit of all.

Ruth McPherson, MEC Trustee and Senior Business Development & Events Manager, ISM

Where to next for music education?

In November 2021, the ISM Trust held a music education conference Where to next for music education? that brought together over 450 music educators. It took place at the end of yet another year of pandemic disruption, and against a backdrop of impassioned debate about what the education system should be seeking to deliver, whilst a new team settles into the Department for Education and a second National Plan for Music Education is in development.

We were keen to ensure that this was a national gathering, with a diverse range of speakers and attendees from across the four UK nations. The session on music education in the devolved nations session focused on what we can learn from recent successes, including the free instrumental tuition campaign and the new National Centre for Music in Scotland, and a new curriculum for the expressive arts in Wales.

The picture in England looks a lot less positive, with ISM Chief Executive Deborah Annetts highlighting the decline in music entries, the Government's focus on a knowledge-rich curriculum, and damaging accountability measures such as the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) and Progress 8. She said 'arts education should be supported, not restricted... We must allow pupils more flexibility in their subject choices to better reflect their interests, talents and future plans.'

We heard repeatedly that music teachers were feeling unsupported and undervalued. The early years music panel explained that EY music education in the UK has suffered from a chronic lack of funding and called for 'real structural change'. And both Mark Phillips, Ofsted's National Lead for Music, and representatives from the ISM's legal team, spoke about the increasing casualisation of the music workforce, and the prevalence of precarious working conditions.

Deborah Annetts concluded the conference by calling for better support and training for music teachers, and thanked them for their resilience, saying, 'You are all incredibly important - you are the backbone of music in this country.'

We all know the value of music, and the power of music education. However, we need to continue to work collaboratively together to communicate it effectively to senior leaders and policy makers, in order to reverse the decline and make lasting positive change.

Watch back the conference sessions and access related blogs, resources and reports.