

EDITORIAL

Editorial

It is an (other) interesting time for music education in England, with the long awaited and much delayed second iteration of the UK government's National Plan for Music Education (NPME) due for publication 'later in 2022' (Arts Council England), having initially been expected in autumn 2021 and delayed numerous times for reasons that are currently unknown.

As the long wait continues, the devastating decline of music education is explored through a provocatively titled report recently published by the Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM): "A Subject in Peril? 10 years on from the first National Plan for Music Education" (Underhill, 2022). Based on a survey of music teachers undertaken between November 2021 and January 2022, the report raises many worrying issues. Some of the key themes relate to the negative impact of school performance measures on the breadth of subjects offered in schools, the significant decline in the numbers of students taking GCSE and 'A' Level music qualifications and the decimation of the arts in the school and wider curriculum. That many of these have been previously highlighted in articles in the *British Journal of Music Education*, and many other publications over recent years suggest that the situation is sadly not improving and that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated an already challenging situation.

A theme of inequality and social justice runs centrally through the aforementioned ISM report. The differences between funding, accessibility and opportunities between state-funded and independent schools are, as we would probably expect, seismic, as is the inequality of access and opportunity within and between many state schools and local communities. Some of the areas raised in this report have been aired again in a recent research report from the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) (2022:8), which states that "Pupils experiencing poverty in England are financially excluded from full participation in a wide range of school subjects and activities, including . . . music". Whilst some young people experience excellent and sustained music education, this is far from universal, even in the school curriculum. It is sadly the case that many young people in England also lack the resources and support to access instrumental tuition and opportunities required to participate in music as they would wish. According to research carried out by CPAG (2022:12).

"The cost of participating fully in musical opportunities at school is preventing pupils in low-income families from flourishing. Limited and stretched household incomes are directly having an impact on engagement and achievement in music for young people in England"

The report goes on to say:

"Pupils have told us that they avoid taking home letters about trips, clubs and musical instrument lessons, meaning that they miss out. Children growing up in poverty are burdened with worries about not being able to afford school activities and not being able to join in with their peers."

Educational disadvantage and the 'disadvantage gap' have also been the focus of a report from the Education Policy Institute (EPI) (2022). Based on the 2020 GCSE cohort, they report that

Two of the most unequal subjects are music and PE, which have both high measured disadvantage gaps and high participation gaps. Disadvantaged pupils are 39 per cent less likely than non-disadvantaged pupils to take music at GCSE . . . and, when they do, they score 1.4 grades below their non-disadvantaged peers . . . This may be driven by parental investments in music and sport outside of school, such as private music and swimming lessons, that are less accessible for disadvantaged pupils. Disparities in schools' teacher availability, as well as their ability to provide equipment and facilities (such as musical instruments and playing fields) may also play a role. (p. 23)

Whether or not the significant issues highlighted by these recent studies are both acknowledged and tackled by the pending National Plan for Music Education for England remains to be seen. Likewise, whether the new NPME will have any 'teeth' to be able to address some of the inequalities across music education is, as yet, unknown. The original NPME, entitled "The Importance of Music" and published in 2011 was described in the preface as follows:

The Importance of Music provides a flexible template for high quality music provision throughout a pupil's education . . . This is the first time that a National Plan for Music Education has set out a central vision for schools, arts and education organisations to drive excellence in music education.

The value of any 'central vision' is diminished if there is insufficient funding and support for the vision to be turned into a reality; additionally, if policies and guidance to schools actively work against opportunities for music to flourish universally, it is sadly only in exceptional cases that this is likely to be overcome. Likewise, the question of whose vision is presented in the forthcoming National Plan and whether it is universally shared or at least widely considered to be realistic and useful remains to be seen, especially because the contents of the yet-to-be-published second iteration of England's National Plan for Music Education are still shrouded in mystery. This is just one of the many points criticised by teachers responding to the ISM's survey, for whom the contents of the new plan will potentially impact their work; "99% of respondents reported that think they should be consulted on the draft National Plan before it is published" (Underhill, 2022:5), although this seems extremely unlikely to happen (TES, 2022).

The status of the original National Plan for Music Education (DfE/DCMS, 2011) is slightly confusing. It is a non-statutory document that nonetheless defines core and extension roles for music education hubs, upon which they secure funding and plan delivery models. Music Education Hubs were formed in 2011 after the publication of the original National Plan for Music Education (DfE/DCMS, 2011) and a special edition of the *British Journal of Music Education* focussed on whole class instrumental teaching published in 2019 explores this aspect of the core roles in detail.

The NPME (DfE/DCMS, 2011) runs parallel to the National Curriculum for music (DfE, 2014); the statutory document laying out the expectation that all children in state schools follow music as a compulsory subject from the ages of 5 to 14 years. However, the National Curriculum does not need to be followed by 44% of schools (HM Government, 2022) who are currently academies or free schools as they have freedom over their curriculum choices.

Recently, an 'additional condition' has been added to the funding requirements for music education hubs. This instructs them to demonstrate:

How you will continue to promote the Model Music Curriculum non-statutory guidance for Key Stages 1–3, through your delivery, communications and support for schools. You must also

ensure that any Key Stage 1–3 music curriculum resources you promote are consistent with the expectations in the model curriculum approach, including on progression and breadth.

(Arts Council England, 2022)

This creates a potentially interesting conundrum. Given that the responsibility of music in the school curriculum lies with schools themselves and not music education hubs, this funding mandate perhaps gives us an indication of the potential future direction of travel for both the roles and remit of music education hubs and the imposition of specific curriculum expectations within a school system that can make its own curricula decisions.

The UK government's recent Education White Paper (HM Government, 2022), the first published in six years, includes the ambition for all schools in England to belong to an academy trust or have plans to be in one by 2030, which suggests that the National Curriculum will become superfluous at that point. With this comes curricula freedom for all, which is somewhat ironic given the apparent attempts to impose more control over the curriculum, through for example, government-backed 'models' in various subjects including music. There is much more for us to ponder in the White Paper about the potential place of music and whether it will survive as a subject within the school day or be pushed to the perimeter whilst the renewed focus on literacy and numeracy and the ambition for all pupils to study the suite of subjects included in the English Baccalaureate, which completely excludes all arts subjects, marches on relentlessly.

The recently published special edition of the *British Journal of Music Education*, focussing on the impacts and influences of the [Swanwick/Tilman Spiral of Music Development](#) 35 years on, clearly and repeatedly shows the power of curriculum autonomy and teacher development. Will the ambition to understand and build on the rich research on musical learning and development, as opposed to the general learning that has been the focus of recent policy documents – see, for example OFSTED's (2021) Research Review – be recognised by the pending refresh of the National Plan for Music Education? By the next publication of this journal, perhaps we will have the answer to this question... In the meantime, we have the pleasure of sharing seven new thought-provoking articles, based on research from across the music education spectrum.

This current edition of the *British Journal of Music Education* opens with two articles relating to students in the 'lower secondary school' (aged 11–14 years) in England. Both make welcome contributions to the discussions and debates on curriculum development – currently a hot-topic in England. The first of these two articles authored by Nikki Booth and Victoria Kinsella, reports on research into threshold concepts (TCs) and formative assessment in group composing processes during secondary school music lessons. The second article, by Anthony Anderson, reports on research into teachers' perceptions of their curriculum design practices.

Our next two articles focus on music education at primary school level. Jelena Martinovića Bogojevića and Branka Rotar Pance's article "Musical creativity in the teaching practice in Montenegrin and Slovenian primary schools" examines the place of musical creativity, drawing some interesting conclusions about its place in the music curriculum and discusses some of the differences, similarities and challenges faced in the context of both Montenegro and Slovenia. As with Anderson's article earlier in this edition, the role of teachers as creators of the curriculum, alongside the perceived expectations and understanding of the written curriculum, is given due consideration.

Jennie Henley and David Barton's article "Time for change? Recurrent barriers in music education" reports on aspects of a research study with over 700 participants that was carried out as part of the work of the Music Commission. This article explores some of the persistent barriers to music education that were identified through this and previous research. Linking directly to this edition's editorial, the authors urge the music education community to reconsider many aspects of music education that are potential root causes of inequality and that, as we "approach the next

iteration of the National Plan for Music Education . . . now is the time to interrogate the infrastructure surrounding those experiencing barriers to music education and now is the time for change”.

Sandra Fortuna and Luc Nijs’ article “The influence of discrete versus continuous movements on children’s musical sense-making” reports on an Italian study with children aged 9–10 years which aimed to “shed light on why and how the body plays a role in music sense-making and learning”. This fascinating study considers the importance of listening, drawing, moving and talking in relation to making learning visible and helping children to develop their musical understanding.

Lotte Latukefu and Jessica Pollard report on a study from a music conservatoire in Australia, where there is ongoing work relating to deliberately reframing of the curriculum in order to better prepare students for the possibilities and challenges of a portfolio career. It highlights some key insights into career transitions that will likely resonate with others working with music students in higher education settings.

The final article in this edition, authored by Thomas Breeze and Gary Beauchamp, considers the ongoing significant under-recruitment to secondary music initial teacher education courses in the UK. It reports on a study with undergraduate music students in which barriers and enablers to moving on to train as a secondary music teacher were explored, providing some practical suggestions that may help to overcome some of the potential barriers in the future.

As we send our thoughts to those around the world who continue to be impacted by COVID-19 and conflict, we hope that the articles in this edition remind you of the power of music education to bring hope and joy to many.

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