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Y Gweinidog Addysg a Sgiliau
Minister for Education and Skills



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref HL/00687/16
William Powell AM
Assembly Member for Mid & West Wales
Chair - Petitions Committee
Ty Hywel
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Dear William

Thank you for your letter of 21 March on behalf of the Petitions Committee seeking my further views on the future of music services for young people in Wales. I will answer the point you raised in your letter regarding funding before moving on to those raised in the petitioner's correspondence.

In answer to your question regarding my decision not to use available funds to support the music services; I made a commitment in 2014 that I would provide £2m support for 5 years to Arts Council of Wales to take forward the Arts and Creative Learning Plan, which is being match funded by the Arts Council of Wales. I wanted to ensure these monies (£20m over 5 years) were secured to support the implementation of the plan, which enables schools across Wales to access opportunities for creative learning activities. I have made it clear that this joint funding should not be used for existing LA activities including Music Services.

Moving on to the points raised by the petitioner, I fully recognise the contribution that music makes to the well-being of young people and the opportunities and experiences it can afford our learners. I am closely following progress on music services to ensure that this important provision continues. As the petitioner has already acknowledged, responsibility lies with local authorities and as such the appropriate delivery model is a matter for local authorities to determine in accordance with the needs of their learners, locally and regionally.

The Music Services Task and Finish Group report that was published in July 2015 does not prescribe a single model of delivery but refers to wider regional and hub working arrangements, as well as other delivery models such as through charitable trusts or arm's length organisations. I am seeking greater consistency within and across local authority provision and I want to encourage authorities to work collaboratively to deliver a more consistent offer to learners.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

On the second point regarding the Lead Creative Schools Scheme; this element of the Arts and Creative Learning Plan, which was described in my previous letter, is intended to give teachers experiences of working with the arts sector; creating lasting partnerships to improve attainment through developing creative learning and teaching practices. The scheme aims to develop the teacher and their skills, giving them the confidence to continue to use and share creative and artistic approaches to learning long after the 2 years of school engagement has ended.

To support this development and to foster greater engagement between schools and the arts sector, a Creative Learning Zone has recently been launched on Hwb, the Welsh Government learning platform. The Creative Learning Zone will be a permanent site which gives schools access to a variety of creative resources, an events page updated by the new creative networks and a community area to facilitate collaboration between schools and the arts sector.

A wide variety of creative partners is represented on the zone and will be working with the networks to provide schools with information on upcoming cultural events and professional development opportunities. Many of these partners are able to offer support for music experiences in and out of the classroom, such as the BBC National Orchestra and Chorus of Wales, Ty Cerdd Welsh Music Centre, the Welsh National Opera and a range of national and regional arts centres. A current list of these partners can be found on the zone at <http://hwb.wales.gov.uk/creativity/partners>.

The work being done under the Arts and Creative Learning Plan will also contribute towards the development of teaching practices and ways of working which in turn will contribute to and support the purposes of the new curriculum, as laid out by Professor Donaldson in his Successful Futures report.

As I said in my previous letter work on the new curriculum by the network of 106 Pioneer Schools, which includes the structure and content of the new Expressive Arts Area of Learning and Experience, has already started.

On the third point I note the concerns regarding participation in the national youth ensembles, particularly those facing young people referred to as being in the “middle ground”. I would like to assure you that it is our goal to safeguard these services and to ensure that talented young musicians, artists and dancers, from all backgrounds, continue to have the opportunity to train and perform at the highest level, with the best talent in their field. A detailed programme of action, which includes but is not exclusively focused on the restructuring of National Youth Arts Wales (NYAW), is currently underway to take forward the 8 recommendations that were proposed by the Music Ensembles task and finish group. I believe that if the recommendations are fully implemented, these actions will go a long way to ensure the future of the ensembles. We therefore encourage all stakeholders, if called upon by the interim and new management, to work together to make the changes needed to ensure the future stability of the ensembles.

More specifically with regards to the fee structure, the report of the task and finish group shows that in comparisons to other UK national ensembles the fees charged to participants in Wales compared favourably to the fees charged by other UK ensembles. These fees, however, varied across the Welsh ensembles and there was therefore a need to standardise and to increase fees in some cases. Since the implementation of the new fee structure for ensembles for 2016/17, NYAW and the task and finish group have monitored the initial effects on take up and continued participation. Early feedback indicates there has been no drop in numbers as a result. We are not being complacent however and have called for NYAW to review the new fee structure annually, benchmarking this to fees charged in other UK nations and regions and to be cognisant of any effects these changes

have on participation. Furthermore, in order to ensure that no group of young performers is prevented from participating we have instructed that the re-launched NYAW, working in partnership with Arts Council of Wales, the Welsh Local Government Association and the Association of Directors of Education in Wales, should prioritise the continuation and further development of bursary arrangements across the ensembles.

On your final point, in terms of funding, clearly we are facing a challenging position. The Welsh Government budget this year is 8% lower overall in real terms than in 2010-11. Despite this, over the current Assembly term we have committed to protect funding for schools at 1% above changes to the Welsh budget overall and through this commitment we have made available an additional £106million for schools. In our Budget for 2016-17 we are continuing this commitment, making available an additional £40million for schools from April this year. Recognising the reductions to the Local Government Settlement Revenue Support Grant (RSG) in recent years, we have nevertheless continued to protect local government in Wales from the level of cuts their counterparts in England have seen over the same period.

Since 1999, local authority expenditure on education has increased from £1.4billion to £2.6billion in 2015-16, which equates to a real terms uplift of 31%. As a result of pressure from Welsh Ministers, local authorities have increased the amount of funding they delegate to schools from 75% in 2010-11 to 84% this year, reducing the amount local authorities retain for centrally funded school services and investing more funding and responsibility in schools. We firmly believe in this approach and in addition to directing more funding to frontline services, we have made significant efforts to increase the funding flexibility for local authorities, regional education consortia and schools to better enable them to focus on their priorities for learners. Over ten years ago, we transferred the former Music Development Fund into the Local Government Settlement with the aim of giving local authorities greater flexibility in determining their funding priorities in the light of local needs and circumstances. More recently we rationalised a number of individual education grants and created a new outcome focused single funding stream through the Education Improvement Grant for Schools.

As we continue to protect schools and local government from the worst of the reductions we are facing as a consequence of the UK Government's continued commitment to austerity, local authorities will receive a better than forecast settlement from April. Despite this, difficult decisions will still have to be made, therefore it is up to local authorities to prioritise their support, and the Task and Finish Group's review highlights practical ways that local authorities could work together to maintain music services.

I am encouraged by Swansea Council's intention to continue funding their subsidy into the next financial year as they and Neath Port Talbot work through the consultation responses and reach a decision on their proposals.



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