

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru / National Assembly for Wales
Pwyllgor Diwylliant, y Gymraeg a Chyfathrebu / The Culture, Welsh Language
and Communications Committee
Ariannu addysg gerddoriaeth a mynediad ati / Funding for and access to
music education
CWLC(5) FAME12
Ymateb gan Elusen Aloud / Evidence from The Aloud Charity

I'm writing to register my interest and those of my organisation, The Aloud Charity which administrates the choirs Only Boys Aloud, the Only Boys Aloud Academi and Only Kids Aloud in the Welsh Government Inquiry into Music Provision.

Having received so much of my own musical training through the Mid Glamorgan Youth Choir, Mid Glamorgan Youth Brass Band and latterly the National Youth Choir of Wales, I know only too well what a difference this activity makes to the creation of engaged, young musicians and perhaps more importantly, well-rounded individuals.

It is highly unlikely that I would have become a professional musician had I not had the benefit of the early musical development 'The Glam' afforded. I have spent my life involved with choral music and partaking in youth music activities as a young man enabled me to overcome bullying in school, find like-minded friends and gave me the confidence and the requisite skills to me study music at university and to eventually carving out a career in the subject I am so passionate about.

Seeing the gradual decline in the county music system in Wales has saddened me greatly. From the age of 11 until I was 14 I got on a free bus every Saturday morning to attend rehearsals for the county brass band. When I was 15, I first sang Messiah and at 16 the Verdi Requiem... all thanks to a thriving organisation that was provided free of charge to me (because of receiving free school meals) and at very little expense to my fellow choristers. What comparable musical activity is provided by government to young musicians in 21st Century Wales?

In 2010, I founded Only Boys Aloud which was then administered by Only Men Aloud. It immediately became apparent that there was an appetite amongst young people for choral music and to this end we established the Aloud charity in 2012 to formalise our provision of choral music for 13-19 year old boys across Wales.

Because of my own experience and development through those opportunities that were provided to me free of charge, it was very important to me that those who need Only Boys Aloud the most (i.e. those without the means for private tuition) are able to access it. For the past seven years, we have provided OBA free of charge to all our members and during this time hundreds of boys have gone through the scheme, many of them never having experienced music-making before and a number of them pursuing a career in music as a result of the scheme. We have numerous testimonials from boys saying how the scheme has impacted positively in their lives and the lives of their families and I am very happy to share all of these with you should the opportunity arise.

As well as a policy of not charging our members, equally important to us is a policy of not auditioning. Many of our members have acute levels of additional learning needs who all feel welcome, valued and that they have something to contribute. We emphasise good discipline at all times and believe that providing a strong framework for our sessions enables our members to grow, not only as musicians but as valuable members of the community. So valued is our work in the area of developing responsible young citizens that we have for the past two years received grants from the 'North Wales Police: Your Community, Your Choice' fund which recognises the impact we've made on the lives of our young choristers in North Wales.

We provide free access to 14 choirs on a weekly basis for our members, all run in community venues (rugby clubs, football clubs etc) in some of the most deprived communities across Wales from Holyhead to Cwmbran. In addition to this we provide a higher level of musical training to 32 of our boys with the ambition and ability to work at an advanced level via our annual Academi. Following success at audition, each member of our Academi receives advanced training in general musicianship, sight-singing and aural training, group choral singing, individual singing lessons, acting, movement and drama. The nine-day residential course immerses the boys in a world of serious-minded music making, helping them achieve their potential and playing a part in the development of the Welsh professional musicians of the future.

We have a small dedicated and hard working team running the Aloud charity and with the support of a tireless, supportive board of trustees, now have a robust business model.

However, we have never received any core funding from public subsidy though we have received a small number projects amounting to around £100,000 over seven years. Our annual fundraising target is £500,000 so as you will see, the vast majority of our funding comes from a wide portfolio of sources including business sponsorship, grants from trusts and foundations, individual donors and any income we can generate from performances. But alongside all of the other income streams we work so hard to secure we strongly feel that public subsidy should be an important part of this mix.

With over 650 boys going through OBA, the total amount of public subsidy for each boy over 7 years is less than £150.

We have also run Only Kids Aloud in partnership with Wales Millennium Centre since 2012 in the form of the WMC/OKA National Children's Chorus of Wales and via the Land of Song project which engaged with over 4,000 key stage 2 children in live performances. WMC have recently withdrawn from this partnership and we are therefore currently investigating ways in which we can continue this provision.

I wish to close my saying that we are "Gwlad Beirdd a Chantorion" but if we are not going to ensure that our youngest and most vulnerable citizens have direct access to music, for how much longer can we hold true to this?

I am delighted that Welsh Government is commissioning this inquiry and am happy to lend any support I can to improve music provision for ALL our young people.