

To: Kirsty Williams AM, Cabinet Secretary for Education  
Dafydd Elis-Thomas AM, Minister for Culture, Tourism and Sport

National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
CF99 1NA

1<sup>st</sup> October 2018

Dear Ms. Williams and Lord Elis-Thomas,

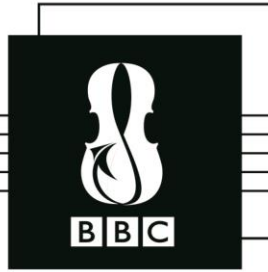
### **Music Services in Wales**

Thank you for your correspondence of earlier in the month responding to the Culture, Welsh Language and Communication Committee's report, "Hitting the Right Note". Since then, a group of colleagues (listed as signatories to this letter and drawn together as leaders of professional music organisation in Wales) have met to consider your published response to the Committee's report. We would like to offer the following comments.

At the heart of the Committee's report is a recommendation that Music Services in the future should be delivered by a new national entity – one with a defined regional presence. This is a bold and radical suggestion and in these challenging times we believe it takes bold and radical suggestions to really make a difference and have true impact. However it is difficult at the moment to identify any existing body that would be easily able to assume such a responsibility. Although evidently in crisis, local authority music services (although discretionary) have the local knowledge and presence to ensure that equity of provision, which is so key to the work of music education, is delivered.

Given this, we warmly encourage the 'feasibility study' that you refer to and for this to be undertaken with urgency. Those local authorities that continue to offer music services (and it is the case that not all 22 of them still do) are under extreme pressure, and in those areas where services have already disappeared, a generation of young people are being denied the opportunity to learn a musical instrument. From our perspective it seems essential that such a study be undertaken and completed before December 2018. We hope, naturally, that this would allow findings to be taken into account during the budget-making processes that the Welsh Government and local authorities will be undertaking over the winter months. To miss an April 2019 deadline for implementation of any new arrangements would undoubtedly risk irreparable damage to an already fragile service.

As signatories to this letter, we all have an interest in seeing musical education thrive across Wales and we are keen to develop a positive role in helping to find solutions to these difficult issues. It would help us if we were clear where the responsibility will be in Government for driving matters forward. In your rejection of recommendation 2 (take strategic ownership of music services etc.) you refer to both the 'ongoing activity within other Ministerial portfolio



areas' and the feasibility study referred to above. We would be grateful if you could clarify what this 'ongoing activity' is. We all have an interest in seeing a sustainable approach to Music Services. If there is other work already underway in different departments, it would help us if it could be made clear what it is, the timetable that is being worked to and ways that we might assist.

Nevertheless, we are pleased to see your acceptance of most of the Culture Committee's recommendations. We would encourage you to move swiftly in delivering the actions that you've outlined in your response to the report.

Michael Dugher, chief executive of UK Music, wrote only last week in an article in the New Statesman that in England:

"One fifth of schools did not offer GCSE Music last year. Of those schools that do offer Music GCSE, 11 per cent are taught outside curriculum time."

Here in Wales, there are already similarly disheartening statistics. At A2 Music (i.e. A Level) in 2008 there were 603 entries (in both Welsh and English language). Ten years later in 2018 there were 327 entries for the same exams.

The decline in music education in England is already having a significant impact. Wales has always prided itself in doing things differently to England, as a country we have always valued the importance of creativity and have doggedly worked to ensure that educational opportunities are available to all, regardless of ability to pay. We don't under-estimate the complexity of the task, but we must all commit to fighting the decline in music education provision that is having such a cataclysmic impact in England.

We make ourselves available for dialogue and advice should the Welsh Government wish to consult us, as part of the wider music sector, on these important topics.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Bellingham, Chief Executive, Sinfonia Cymru

Nick Capaldi, Chief Executive, Arts Council of Wales

Michael Garvey, Director, BBC National Orchestra and Chorus of Wales

Helena Gaunt, Principal, Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama

Gillian Mitchell, Chief Executive, National Youth Arts Wales

Meinir Llwyd Roberts, Director, Canolfan Gerdd William Mathias

Leo Thomson, Managing Director, Welsh National Opera

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