

Adam Vaughan  
Deputy Clerk  
Culture, Welsh Language & Communications Committee  
National Assembly for Wales

VIA E MAIL

17<sup>th</sup> October 2018

Dear Adam

I am writing as Principal of the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama in response to the report by the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee (CWLCC) '*Hitting the Right Note: Inquiry into Funding for and Access to Music Education*' (June 2018) and in advance of the debate on the Welsh Government's response to the report scheduled at the Senedd for October 24.

The Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama (RWCMD) is the National Conservatoire of Wales. It operates within an international marketplace of leading Conservatoires and Drama Schools and provides specialist performance-based training that enables young professional artists to enter and shape the world of music, theatre and the related professions. The College has a key educational role in Wales - identifying and developing new talent and providing high quality vocational training tailored to the demands of today's rapidly growing arts and creative industries. The College is also proud of its Junior Conservatoire which offers the only training of its kind in Wales, each week immersing students in a specialist environment where they can benefit from an intensive and holistic musical education.

The College's relationship to music education as a whole in Wales is critical. The success and sustainability of the College relies on its ability to recruit the most talented students. Although overall performance in this area remains strong, we have recently witnessed a significant shift in demographic patterns within our recruitment. Historically, the College has attracted up to a third of its applications for undergraduate music study from Wales, reflecting both the nation's rich musical heritage and the outstanding performance of the country's music service provision. However, in recent years, we have seen this number decline significantly, for example over the past six years undergraduate music applications from Welsh-domiciled students have fallen by 30% and now account for just 13% of overall application numbers. The correlation between this statistical pattern and the declining music service provision across Wales provides an indication of the seriousness of the current situation. It is a stark portent of a potential future picture which may emerge in the absence of a concerted effort to remedy the decline of a strong, nationwide music service provision.

A similar pattern of decline relating to the musical activities of young people in Wales has been experienced by other national organisations, including the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) which has seen entrant numbers for music examinations in Wales fall significantly over recent years. Similarly, flagship ensembles within the newly reconfigured National Youth Arts Wales organisation have struggled to recruit in key areas, for example the National Youth Orchestra of Wales this year had to revise its eligibility criteria in order to reach required numbers of sufficiently advanced players.



We firmly believe that our remit as a National and a Royal institution extends beyond the boundaries of our own specialist training activities. This may be evidenced, for example in our extensive programme of outreach and community engagement activities which, in 2017-18 went to 100 venues across 10 Welsh local education authorities and involved over 8500 young participants in over 200 workshops. However, these activities can only serve as an enhancement to the work of a wider network of locally-based music education resources working with young people week by week.

In relation to the CWLCC's report, the National Conservatoire welcomes the Welsh Government's commitment to ensuring that access to music and music education is available for all learners who wish to participate, irrespective of location, social background or ability to pay. It also welcomes the Government's reference to a National Plan for Music Education (responsibility for which might naturally sit within the remit of the Cabinet Secretary for Education), and the allocation of £1 million per annum for 2018/19 and 2019/20 to support music service provision during a particularly challenging period of delivery and change. We see the potential of these developments as key enhancements to other Government initiatives, including its investment in the endowment fund and the musical instrument amnesty (within which the College has been pleased to play a central role). We believe that the establishment of a national, over-arching body for music services in Wales with associated financial capabilities and a regional element to its delivery on a ground level could provide a key way forward for all concerned.

The Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama has been pleased to host recent meetings of the Music Education Council (MEC) in its discussions relating to the future of Welsh music services and is fully committed to playing a practical role in support of a solution-led approach to what is clearly a complex set of issues surrounding this area of national educational significance. Within the overall ecosystem of music education that combines both school curriculum and for example music service provision, we would be able in particular to play a leading role in developing a National Strategy for Exceptional Talent in Music, and to use our extensive expertise to support workforce development through offering programmes of Continuing Professional Development for peripatetic music teachers across Wales, and for example providing input to primary and secondary teacher training. In addition, we can offer our broad experience in providing outreach and community engagement projects in music as part of a coordinated, inclusive and nationwide network in this area in collaboration with industry partners across Wales.

I hope that this response has been helpful and I look forward to the debate on 24<sup>th</sup> October and its outcomes.

Yours sincerely



Professor Helena Gaunt  
Principal

