



THE  
MUSIC  
COMMISSION

# RETUNING OUR AMBITION FOR MUSIC LEARNING

EVERY CHILD TAKING MUSIC FURTHER

A Ten-Year Vision from The Music Commission

# Foreword

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Music is all around us. Whether heard, sung, played, streamed, broadcast, experienced live or accessed through ever more diverse technology, it is a basic, elemental part of our lives. Music is a stimulus to memory, an expression of our deepest emotions, and a way of collaborating with others. We know that the impact of a thrilling musical experience can stay with us for ever.

How do we build on this excitement, and explore further? For music is also a craft to be learned, a skill to be developed. Participating in the act of making music is one of the most inspiring of human activities and mastering the technical art of music is a challenge that brings huge rewards. But in recent years the routes into learning music have changed radically, because the ways in which music comes to us have been transformed. Are our learning journeys now in danger of becoming out of step with the reality of how people engage with music today?

The very stimulating discussions we have had as colleagues in this Music Commission have brought forward this one specific issue, that of progression. How can we find diverse routes of exploration, offering development and music learning that is supported and nurtured both inside and outside the formal education system, in ways that reflect the energy and diversity of today's world?

The good news is that solutions exist. We have seen excellent good practice, which can be studied and disseminated. But we need a more collective and a more connected approach to creating these pathways and taking them forward. We need a concerted effort through advocacy, and inspiring role models, to prove once and for all the enduring value of this activity.

The Music Commission report is offered as a positive contribution to an already long and rich debate. Its one question is: how can we fundamentally retune our ambition for music learning by focusing on the need for progress and progression routes? As our report shows, there are many improvements, links to connect our resources, detailed initiatives that can bring us closer to the aim of providing routes into music for all.

Our one aim is to unlock creativity in everyone, with the belief that this will benefit individual skills and community activity, generating soft power and business skills that build long-term economic benefit. We thus release the power of music in the service of today's world, where the depth, perspective and humanity that music brings is not an option, but an ever more urgent necessity.



**Sir Nicholas Kenyon**  
Chair, The Music Commission

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# Summary

Retuning Our Ambition for Music Learning: A Ten-Year Vision

1



Leaders in schools and education are confident and enabled to put music at the heart of their students' learning

2



Every school is supported to provide an effective music curriculum and the provision of a quality music offer is a key performance measure

Every young person, regardless of her or his circumstances, realise her or his potential

8



New, integrated approaches to the teaching and assessment of learning of music in a digital age are developed

7



Young people are informed and engaged in shaping their own learning pathways and involved in the development of music education programmes

3



The development of a diverse and skilled music education workforce is extended through enhanced training of specialist and generalist teachers, and support to enter the profession

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background or  
is supported to  
his full musical  
ntial.

4



Financial support is universally available to support all music learners to progress beyond first access

5



More collaborative models of music education are established, involving support for and between schools and relevant partners to help students to progress in music

6



Parental engagement is supported as a priority from the earliest years onwards

# Outcomes for the 2020s



## 1 Leaders in schools and education are confident and enabled to put music at the heart of their students' learning

### Key recommendations:

- **National Centres for Leadership in Music Education**, established through the nomination of lead organisations in respective countries, working in partnership with teacher training bodies, institutions of tertiary education and wider leadership programmes in education to embed and develop leadership skills in the music education sector
- **The appointment of national Music Champions**, working with each of these Centres, to promote music education, progression and quality in the teaching and learning of music; to encourage stakeholders to work effectively together; to advise governments on action they and others could take to encourage a more conducive environment for music education; and to motivate schools to place music and creative education at the heart of their offer
- **Music in Schools Awards**. The development of schemes, building on existing initiatives, to recognise and celebrate best practice in schools built upon simple and readily evidenced criteria such as having a specialist music teacher; an attached musician, composer or ensemble; engagement of the local music bodies in supporting progression; weekly timetabling of music within the core curriculum; extra curricula choirs and ensembles; and support for students and parents at points of transition.



## 2 Every school is supported to provide an effective music curriculum and the provision of a quality music offer is a key performance measure

### Key recommendations:

- **School inspection and assessment models acknowledging the importance of music**, cultural education and creativity that builds on prior knowledge and sets young people up to succeed in further study and life beyond. Schools that are judged “outstanding” or high performing should have a rich creative arts provision including music as part of their “broad and balanced” curriculum. This should be supported by a wider dissemination and transparency of best practice in music identified by school inspection services through periodic national reports and case studies
- **National curriculum models for the subject of Music**, building on existing best practice to guide teachers and school leaders towards the specific knowledge and skills that music education should help students achieve at each stage of their musical learning. Music services and music organisations, and Music Education Hubs, providing increased support for the music curriculum in alternative settings, such as special schools, pupil referral units and hospital schools to ensure equity of provision
- **New contemporary materials to ensure that support for progress** is at the heart of music learning in schools. This will involve the development, by local and national partners and publishers in music and music education, of a range of high-quality tools and resources for schools that provide the guidance and clarity for teachers on how to teach and assess the fundamental components of music.



### 3 The development of a diverse and skilled music education workforce is extended through enhanced training of specialist and generalist teachers, and support to enter the profession

#### Key recommendations:

- **A re-evaluation of the focus and content of initial teacher training (ITT) for music** to include more music training time allocated in PGCE courses and all music teacher training to have a focus on progression, including time for music in the proposed two-year PGCEs in England. Higher expectations of recruits to primary ITT, and more funding for specialist primary school music teachers
- **National and local music teacher networks**, to promote peer learning, guidance and support, with the aim of forging far more effective connections for classroom, peripatetic and independent music teachers and schools to support progress and build common purpose and understanding
- **Independent music teachers to be better valued as part of provision**, integrating them through voluntary registration and accreditation into music teaching focused on supporting progression, recognised by governments and music services
- **Every secondary school with at least one music specialist teacher** on its staff and initial teacher training for all primary school teachers, combined with improved programmes of accredited continuing professional development in music offered locally and nationally
- **The development of a diverse music education workforce** with support for a much wider range of young people to enter the teaching profession, in or out of school, with paid internships and apprenticeships.



### 4 Financial support is universally available to support all music learners to progress beyond first access

#### Key recommendations:

- **Free school-based instrumental tuition for all.** In reviewing the structure and funding of Music Education Hubs in England and music services elsewhere, evaluate the available resources among education services, arts organisations and other relevant bodies to align and direct more funds towards progression. This should include guaranteed four-year agreements for the funding of Music Education Hubs and music services contingent on agreed key outcomes for inclusion and progression
- **The establishment of National Progression in Music Challenge Funds** and non-statutory and philanthropic financing opportunities open to schools and local and regional partners to pioneer and evaluate new approaches to supporting progression in music and developing local and regional ensembles
- **Music Premiums.** The introduction of government schemes to support music in primary schools, with funding for music in schools more effectively targeted at integrated first access and progression programmes and more active use of the Pupil Premium and comparable schemes to support disadvantaged pupils.

## Outcomes for the 2020s



### 5 More collaborative models of music education are established, involving support for and between schools and relevant partners to help students to progress in music

#### Key recommendations:

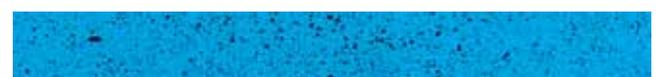
- **National Music Education Plans** setting out national aims and expected outcomes, specifically setting a clearer framework for collaboration and implementation of local music education plans founded on partnerships working to deliver local progression strategies, engaging schools, music organisations, other education establishments and local musicians and independent music teachers
- **The establishment of Research and Knowledge Exchange Centres** for progression in music education, run in each country by existing academic and expert organisations and in England in partnership with Arts Council England, to generate research, promote best practice and innovation on the learning of music, funded by Research Councils, lottery funding, other charitable and philanthropic sources; working alongside and supporting the Music Champions to develop locally-available resources supporting progress in music
- **New schools' partnerships**, involving groups of primary and secondary schools, and bringing together networks of teachers, working together to define a locally-agreed curriculum to promote access, inclusion, diversity, progress and greater consistency in content and approach for pupils
- **Collaboration, alignment and partnership in support of local need** is a stipulation of the funding for arts and music organisations, including in England through Arts Council England, National Portfolio Organisations, recipients of project grants and Music Education Hubs. This will require building further on support from Music Education Hubs and others to ensure that learning provision by National Portfolio Organisations is closely aligned to local need and activity.



### 6 Parental engagement is supported as a priority from the earliest years onwards

#### Key recommendations:

- **Dynamic local and regional online Music Maps** that provide accessible tools and guidance for parents and learners to see the formal and informal opportunities available for them to develop their musical interests, broaden their experiences and make progress
- **The establishment of national and regional Early Learners' Music Forums** bringing together emerging initiatives and including broadcasters, online content developers and educationalists to support pre-school music learning and provide resources for parents, nursery schools and childminders
- **Targeted broadcast and social media information** enabling parents, carers and young people, led by schools in partnership with music organisations, to access authoritative guidance on the wider benefits of music and the value of music education for child development and well-being.





## 7 Young people are informed and engaged in shaping their own learning pathways and involved in the development of music programmes and initiatives

### Key recommendations:

- **A requirement placed on music organisations to involve young people** and to act on their views to bring about a shift in music education culture; one that values young people's voices and, in appropriate cases, a grant condition for music organisations to consult and report on this involvement in their planning and programme delivery
- **Dedicated and youth-led spaces** provided for young people's learning in local centres and schools, supporting the creation and exploration of music equipped with the technology to connect young people in their music making and creativity
- **Best practice guides and case studies on the engagement of the voice of young people** in music education delivered through Research and Knowledge Exchange Centres for progression, including conducting regular national and regional surveys of the views, ambitions and musical aspirations of young people facilitated by arts councils, music services and other music education providers.



## 8 New, integrated approaches to the teaching and assessment of learning of music in a digital age are developed

### Key recommendations:

- **A UK Digital Research and Development Fund for music**, piloted through an organisation such as the Arts & Humanities Research Council, for music education, funding three-way partnerships between music organisations, tech companies and academic researchers to test new ways that technology can be used in music education, drawing on the lessons of the Digital R&D Fund for the Arts in England
- **A Technology in Music Competition**, piloted by the music industry, to showcase the most exciting uses of technologies in making music by young people across the UK. This to specifically lead to the creation of champions and role models – led by young people themselves - to connect learners to new technologies for music learning and teaching
- **A Music Education Digital Forum** spearheading new UK-wide partnerships with the music industry, tech companies and music educators to identify best practice, jointly develop standards and resources for the development of innovation in music education resources to catalyse the use of technology, develop support and tools for schools.

# About The Music Commission

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The Music Commission was established by the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) and Arts Council England to examine how people from all backgrounds, especially young people, can be the best they can be in music. And we focus on young people in this report because that's where it all begins. Because we know that getting it right in those first stages is the platform for a lifelong interest in music making, participation and performance.

We started from the premise that making progress in music matters. Making music to the best of our ability enriches and connects us. It unlocks talents and skills that we use every day that benefit us throughout our lifetimes. At the pinnacle, it generates significant economic value.

But progress is also complicated. In or out of school, there are many factors that affect whether we can reach our musical potential. Assessing how progress can be supported is kaleidoscopic in its nature, considering home environments, geographies, finances and funding, school structures, teaching, community music resources, learning styles, and the rapid pace at which technology is changing amongst many other factors.

Our work has explored the conditions in which progress in music can be better sustained, including looking at barriers, assessing best practice and identifying the support that needs to be in place. It has taken us to schools, community groups, choirs, bands, ensembles and orchestras to name a few. Our team has spoken to and heard from people from all backgrounds, those at the top of their musical careers as well as those playing their first notes and singing for the first time in a choir. Whilst our inquiry and findings have taken us to every corner of the UK, much of what we have found applies to the learning of music wherever it takes place.

Our approach has been to seek to review the evidence to better understand the routes into and through musical learning, in order that these support needs can be addressed as people move through the stages of learning music. This is as relevant to music learners in Singapore as it is to learners in Scotland. To this end, we have carried out independent analysis with the goal of making practical and realistic recommendations for policy makers and leaders at all levels in education both in the UK and globally.

The Music Commission is chaired by **Sir Nicholas Kenyon**, managing director of the Barbican Centre, former director of the BBC Proms, and former controller of BBC Radio 3.

The Music Commission's Panel members are artists, chief executives, academics, economists, music educators and leaders, each with influential roles in the music and arts world. They have expert insights into the different ways that music is taught and learned, and all work to promote the value and role of music today.

The Panel members are:



**Dr Sam Aaron** - Research associate, Wolfson College, University of Cambridge, live coder and founder of Sonic Pi



**Nick Mulvey** - Musician, singer and songwriter



**Hasan Bakhshi MBE** - Executive Director, Creative Economy and Data Analytics, Nesta and Director, Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre



**Paul Roberts OBE** - Chair of the board of directors for the Innovation Unit, vice-chair at Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts and Nottingham Contemporary, national council member, Arts Council England



**Carolyn Baxendale MBE** - Head, Bolton Music Service, leader of Greater Manchester Music Education Hub



**Nitin Sawhney CBE** - Artist, producer, songwriter, club DJ, broadcaster, multi-instrumentalist, and orchestral composer



**Professor Pamela Burnard** - Professor of Arts, Creativities and Education, University of Cambridge



**Abel Selacoe** - Cellist, improviser, co-founder of BBC Introducing artists' world-folk-fusion quintet Kabantu



**Sam Jackson** - Managing editor, Classic FM and Smooth Radio



**David Whelton OBE** - Former managing director, Philharmonia Orchestra



**Mary King** - Singer, educator, vocal coach, writer and broadcaster



**Claire Whitaker OBE** - Director of live music producers Serious and the EFG London Jazz Festival.



**Suzy Klein** - Writer and presenter, BBC Radio 3

**We would also like to acknowledge the valuable support and input from a great many people and organisations; experts and researchers, leaders and professionals who have been with us on our journey to explore musical progress. These include:**

ABO (Association of British Orchestras)	English Folk Dance and Song Society	National Youth Folk Ensemble
Artforms Music, Leeds	English National Opera	National Youth Jazz Orchestra
Arts Award	ENO Baylis	National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain'
Attitude is Everything	Great Yarmouth Community Trust	NESTA
Aurora Orchestra	Griffin Schools Trust	Newham Music
Awards for Young Musicians	Guildhall School of Music & Drama	Nottingham Music Hub
Barbican	Heads Together	OHMI (One-Handed Musical Instrument Trust)
BBC	Help Musicians UK	Opera North
Birmingham City University	ISM (Incorporated Society of Musicians)	Orchestras Live
Birmingham University	Jukedeck	Paul Hamlyn Foundation
Blackheath Conservatoire	Leicestershire Music Hub	Piano Teachers' Hour
Bolton Music Hub	London Music Fund	Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years
Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra	Luminate Scotland	RAM (Royal Academy of Music)
Bristol Plays Music	Making Music	RCM (Royal College of Music)
CBSO Community Choir	MEC (Music Education Council)	RNCM (Royal Northern College of Music)
Choir Schools' Association	MERYC (Music Educators and Researchers of Young Children)	RCS (Royal Conservatoire Scotland)
Classic FM	Music Mark	RPS (Royal Philharmonic Society)
Cornwall Music Education	Musicians' Union	Serious
Creative Futures	National Open Youth Orchestra	Sing Up
Creative Learning Alliance	National Polish Choir	So Vocal
Drake Music	National Teachers' Choir	Sonic Pi
Durham Music Service	National Youth Choirs of Great Britain	
Education Authority Northern Ireland		

Sound and Music  
Sound Connections  
Steinberg  
The Cathedral Choir Association  
The Garage Trust  
The Roundhouse  
The Society of Teachers of Speech  
and Drama  
Tri-Borough Music Education Hub  
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Music

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Consultant

**Marcus Davey OBE**, Chief  
Executive and Artistic Director,  
Roundhouse

**Stuart Whatmore**, Head,  
Tri-borough Music Hub

**Sir David Carter**, former National  
Schools Commissioner

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# Our research programme

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The aim of The Music Commission's research programme has been to inform the Panel's discussions and provide an evidence base for its recommendations, grounding our work in the most pertinent recent research. The total number of participants in the research studies reviewed is 10,104.

The research programme has involved four strands:

- **Field notes:** From the launch of The Music Commission, many conversations with practitioners, experts and music learners have been recorded and collated to explore the field, identify stakeholders, and steer the direction of the research programme and development of research questions. This has led to:
- **Empirical work:** The purpose of the empirical work has been to provide a picture from the field about current ideas on progression. New empirical data has been collected via a survey exploring what supports and stands in the way of progression; and targeted focus groups, each of these producing collaborative statements that summarise perspectives on progression. In particular, research participants were asked to reflect on the opportunities and barriers available to them or music learners in relation to four identified impacts on musical progress: people, places, pathways and, points in time. This has led to:
- **Evidence review:** The purpose of this strand of research has been to explore recent literature and draw out key themes and findings related to musical progress. It cross referenced empirical work with a larger sample of research studies to see whether our sample reflected the issues identified on a larger scale. A Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) provided an informed conclusion on the volume and characteristics of the evidence base together with a synthesis of what it indicates following a critical appraisal.<sup>1</sup>
- **UK-wide survey:** The Music Commission also carried out a UK-wide survey of 2,009 people to better understand the incentives for continuing to learn music and the barriers that stop people making progress. Conducted in February 2019 by Walnut Unlimited (formerly ICM), the survey asked the key factors responsible for people continuing to learn, the benefits of making progress and what would most help them make progress now.

Together, these research strands have formed the structure and themes that are developed throughout The Music Commission's report. A separate research report is being published following The Music Commission's main report later in 2019.

## Research Reference Group

The Research Reference Group has been made up of leading academics working in the fields of music education and cultural policy. It was chaired by Professor Pat Thomson (University of Nottingham). The role of this group has been to peer-review, advise and provide a scholarly underpinning to the Commission's research.

The Research Reference Group comprises the following academics:



**Professor Pat Thomson** is Professor of Education in the School of Education at The University of Nottingham. She researches the arts and creativity and their role in school and community change.



**Professor Martin Fautley** is Director of Research in the School of Education and Social Work at Birmingham City University.



**Dr Jennie Henley** is Area Leader for Music Education at the Royal College of Music, London.



**Professor Susan Hallam MBE** is Emerita Professor of Education and Music Psychology at the UCL Institute of Education.



**Frances Howard** is a Doctoral researcher from The University of Nottingham's School of Education.



**Dave O'Brien** is the Chancellor's Fellow in Cultural and Creative Industries at the University of Edinburgh.



**Stewart Riddle** is Senior Lecturer in the School of Teacher Education and Early Childhood at the University of Southern Queensland.



**Emily Winchip** is a Doctoral researcher at the University of Nottingham and the recipient of a Vice-Chancellor's scholarship.

## Join a band group

Christiana, clarinet



## To start learning the guitar

Sophie, singer



## Create a concert

Lejitt, rapper



## Keep learning about musical theatre

George, singer



## Carry on loving playing

Chelsea, tenor saxophone, jazz composer and arranger



## To play for myself and to play for everyone as well

Sydney, keyboard, trombone and guitar

# What do you want to do with your music?



## Get my band back together

Phil, director Bristol Music Trust

## Go play in front of the Queen

Kate, violin



## Join an orchestra playing the clarinet

Rachel, piano and clarinet



cept video



**Get a bit better with music tech**

Claire, organist and teacher

**I would like to play the saxophone**

Lily, singer



**Go on a singing show like The Voice Kids**



Scarlett, singer

**I want to write a big full-size full-length opera**

Cheryl, composer



**you want  
next  
r music?**

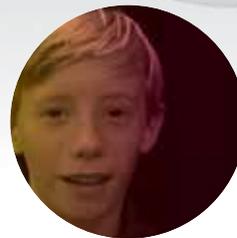
**Go further in my career of flute**

Joy, flute



**Play in professional orchestras**

Morgan, violin



**Combining electronic pop music, experimental stuff with the more classical**

Benjamin, composer

**Continue to ... empower primary teachers**

Laurel, assistant head teacher



**Learn more notes**

Harjeet, clarinet



# The case for musical progress

## Why does it matter that everyone has the opportunity to make progress in music?

Our case is a simple one. If every one of us can take our music further, we will all benefit; individually, as communities and, as a society.

Music can have a transformative impact on an individual's life. A child's first experience of music should be a magical one and the start of a journey that, with the right support, can provide unimaginable rewards. Studies show that learning music builds skills, knowledge and understanding, which go far beyond music itself. Playing an instrument or singing instils confidence and boosts academic attainment. Young people who have the application and discipline to progress in music reap huge personal gains, developing their creativity and personal growth.

We know that young people make progress in music in a wide range of settings. Wherever they take place, those initial inspiring experiences of music be they at home, in the community or at school, are central to providing the impetus for study and skills development.

Music develops our cognitive powers. Recent compelling evidence<sup>2</sup> shows that musical training sharpens the brain's early encoding of sound leading to enhanced performance on a range of listening and aural processing skills which in turn contribute to enhanced verbal memory, language skills and enhanced literacy, verbal and spatial reasoning and higher levels of performance on measures of intelligence.

Music is our physical and spiritual well-being. Research shows the wider social, emotional and physical benefits that come from participation in music, through which musical activities function as safe and enjoyable collaborative spaces where social barriers are broken down, emotions can be expressed, and confidence built<sup>3</sup>. In this way, music is a support and health for our minds and bodies, a means of therapy, a route to emotional, physical and psychological happiness.

**Well-being, including personal satisfaction (58%) and fun (46%) are seen as the biggest benefits of learning music.**

The Music Commission survey by Walnut Unlimited (formerly ICM) 15-18 February, 2019<sup>4</sup>

Music is our community. Participation in music in the community offers people of all ages and abilities the chance to enjoy singing and making music together and improve their skills individually and collectively. The pleasure, freedom of expression, and social support afforded by a choir, for example, is known to develop stronger social bonds.

Music is a means by which we experiment with our bodies, exploring our capabilities, testing the limits of our dedication, concentration and resolve. For some, music is a route into the world of study and work, a world to be examined and explored, a journey of knowledge, ambitions and fulfilment. For others it will be an enriching, constant background to their lives. Each route is valuable. Each should be supported.

In a world where resilience and adaptability are ever more important, learning music gives young people flexibility, lateral thinking, and a creative approach to problem-solving. Amidst huge technological advances and a rapidly changing global economy, analysts predict that adaptable skills will be the key to maximising the opportunities ahead. Emotional intelligence and innovation are now widely seen to be the essential attributes people need to ensure economic competitiveness in this fast-changing world. Many economies have recognised this and are investing heavily in developing these creative skills for the future workforce to meet changing labour market demands.

Music is vital to economies. In the UK alone, the music industry is worth an estimated £4.5bn a year<sup>5</sup> and projects its “soft power” around the world. Among the big success stories is its recorded music sector which saw a rise of 9% to £700 million and music publishing which grew by 7% to £505 million in the year to 2017<sup>6</sup>.

Successful British acts including Jess Glynne, Ed Sheeran, Dua Lipa, Rag’N’Bone Man, Stormzy, and Depeche Mode helped exports of UK music increase over the same period by 7% to £2.6 billion<sup>7</sup>. Those attending concerts, from festivals to local music venues, helped live music contribute £991 million to the UK’s economy<sup>8</sup>. At a time when our global relationships and economic partnerships are ever more important, the role music plays in nations’ economies is essential.

So, whilst learning and making progress in music is invaluable for the skills and connections it develops, it is also essential that we better prepare young people to shape and profit from the expansion of opportunities that music itself offers to those who develop their talents. Because, by supporting everyone to achieve their potential in music, we increase the pipeline of talent that can reach the top. Beyond the value of music as a discipline in its own right, therefore, the economic case for supporting the musical progress of all young people is incontrovertible.

We believe that we have a shared responsibility to support the development of musical skills, knowledge and technique in the widest range of settings. We therefore make the case that all young people should have an equal opportunity, regardless of income or geography, to be the best they can be in music. We know talent exists across society and we need to ensure equal opportunities for that talent to grow and flourish to the benefit of all.

However, for those children who must overcome social, educational, cultural or physical hurdles and find themselves disadvantaged in their pursuit of music at a young age through no fault of their own, the challenges are ever greater. There is excellent work being undertaken in many areas, but the loss of opportunities for the learning of music in many

schools, the demands being placed on parents to pay to support their child’s progression in music, and the varying quality and nature of music education provision is contributing to a narrowing of the demographic of those able to continue to learn music and achieve their potential. This trend, if not addressed, will have adverse effects on individual, community, societal and economic development.

**Lack of opportunities and cost are seen by the public as the two biggest barriers to them taking their music further.**

**The Music Commission survey by Walnut Unlimited (formerly ICM), 15-18 February, 2019<sup>9</sup>.**

In the UK, we have seen much evidence of extensive best practice in both formal and informal music education. This excellence is often led by highly motivated, inspirational leaders, teachers and musicians, and parents, and can equally involve self-study and the creation of home-made music through digital means. Common features that enable excellence to flourish, however, are early access to music, a solid grounding in musical knowledge and skills and the investment of time and resources into a learner’s musical development. Successive governments have taken significant steps in providing first access to music making for millions of children. Yet this enormously worthwhile investment does not bear fruit unless it is part of a connected approach that leads to dedicated and consistent support for all learners who wish to continue beyond these initial experiences.

It is, therefore, this matter of supporting progress in the learning of music that has been the focus of our deliberations and which lies at the core of our report and recommendations.

Our review of the available evidence and consideration of expert testimonies has identified what we believe are the barriers that must be overcome in the coming years if all people are to enjoy a truly equal opportunity to make musical progress. We acknowledge that many organisations and individuals are overcoming these barriers, but that the solutions are not available to all. There is no simple, single answer. These challenges are complex and interrelated and we recognise that tackling them is no simple task. This is why we suggest a long-term framework for addressing them.

### **There is a wide inconsistency of music provision in schools.**

Some schools have a philosophy of music for everyone, where learners' needs are identified and supported, whilst others provide hardly any music at all. We need to understand why this occurs, and how it can be improved.

### **The cost barriers to families represent a significant inequality of access to music education.**

Parents on low and middle incomes may not be able to allocate the funds needed for their children to pursue their musical interests. At the same time, in many areas, the provision of music teaching funded by local authorities has decreased significantly or disappeared altogether.

### **There has been an inadequate response to how young people use technology in their experience of music.**

Despite many examples of innovative practice, learners' expectations of new technologies and the opportunities they provide for innovative, low-cost, self-directed learning must be better understood and embraced.

### **There is insufficient support beyond first access programmes for learners who wish to progress their music education.**

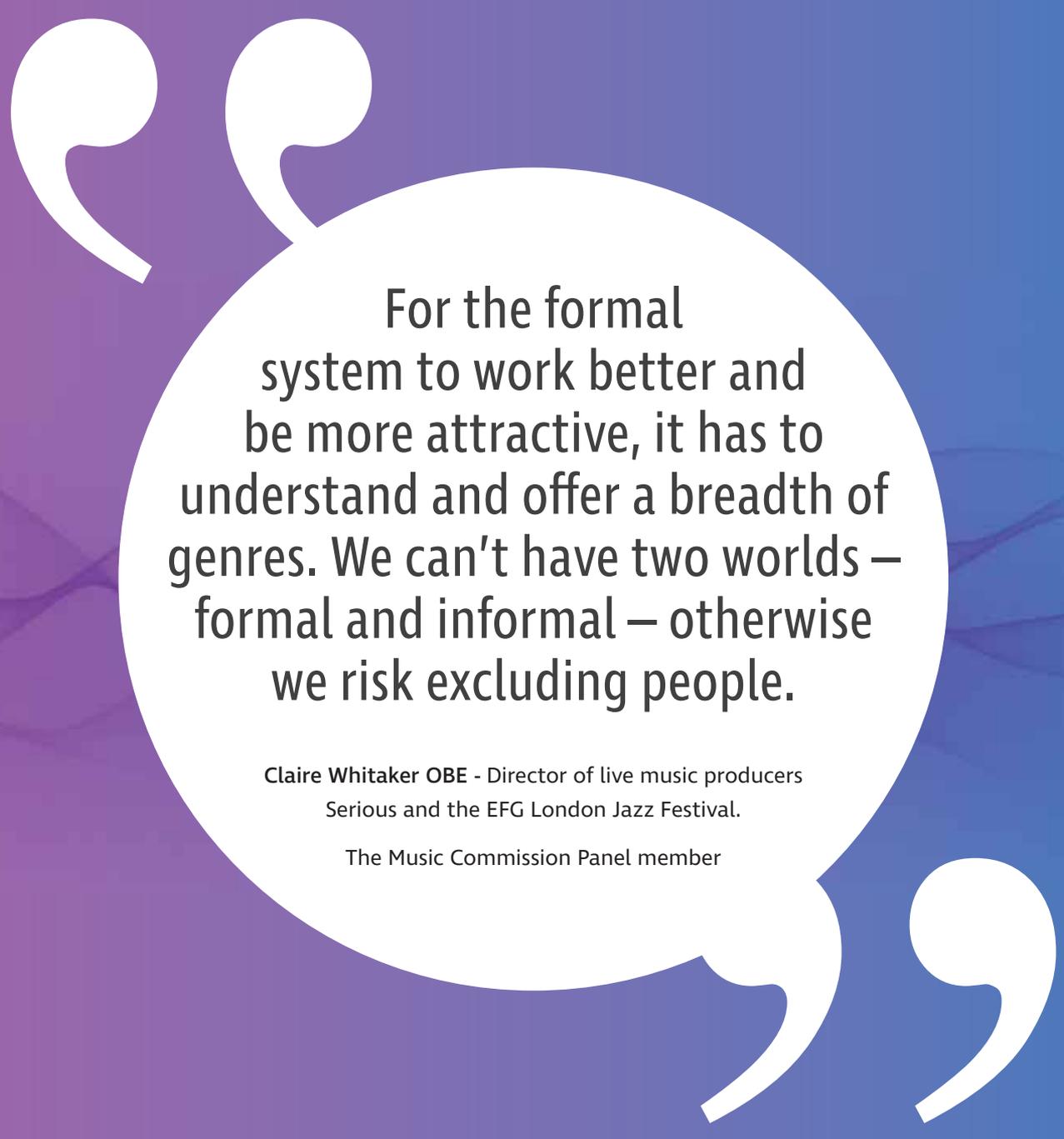
An individual's interest in music may be significant but increasingly, within schools and on the move from primary to secondary education, music is deprioritised as a focus on standard assessment tests, examinations, measurement of school performance and league tables takes over.

### **Schools need greater support in delivering a rich music curriculum that focuses on key musical skills.**

There is presently too little guidance provided as to the range and detail of musical skills that are needed in the school curriculum, and the support needed to deliver it. Whilst there need not be a single music curriculum taught in all schools, there is a need to assist schools to develop their own music curriculum that provides for challenge and encourages progression.

### **Resources and organisations are not working together effectively enough to support every learner to progress,**

including by linking and aligning the wide variety of routes for learning. Schools should be supported to commission the full range of resources available from local cultural and other sectors in order to enhance learners' musical experiences, and work with arts-based providers to build those resources into provision. Outside of their school-based activities there is significant inconsistency in the opportunities and spaces for young people to develop their individual and collective music making.



For the formal system to work better and be more attractive, it has to understand and offer a breadth of genres. We can't have two worlds – formal and informal – otherwise we risk excluding people.

Claire Whitaker OBE - Director of live music producers  
Serious and the EFG London Jazz Festival.

The Music Commission Panel member

# Retuning our ambition

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Our central conclusion is that music education must now be firmly centred on enabling all young people to make progress in their musical knowledge, understanding and skills. Over the next ten years, we believe that this single purpose should drive strategies, partnerships, delivery and investment in every area and aspect of music education.

Young people are listening to music, sharing music and making music as never before. And the ways in which they do this are changing radically. The dizzying variety of what is musically available makes the idea of one progression route much more complex than it was in the past. It is also potentially much richer as people move through listening, improvisation and composition to explore their interests. Yet, what we have in music education is too often an artificial distinction between classroom music and all other music when it would benefit the learner far more if these worlds complemented each other.

We see across the generations the barriers breaking down between one genre and the next. Because of the technological changes by which everything is available to everybody at the touch of an icon, young people in particular have a much more fluid approach to tradition and learning. It is vital, therefore, that we find new kinds of structures to support these developments. It is in this wider educational landscape within which mixed modes of learning take place, where people can explore their tastes and curiosity, where music education must catch up.

In retuning our ambitions, we wish to see the following goal realised through the collective efforts of those leading, working in, and supporting music education:

Every young person, regardless of background or circumstances, is supported to realise her or his full musical potential.

Given the diversity and complexity of the music education sector, what this report seeks to do is to set out broad ambitions for progression in music education. Next to these ambitions, in the body of this report, we identify some of the steps that we believe need to be taken to achieve them. These ambitions are expressed as a series of outcomes designed to help set a course for the future of music education through the 2020s; a future that is focused on ensuring every music learner has the chance to be the best they can be.

Most importantly, we want our findings and recommendations to prompt discussion, in schools and communities, between parents and music teachers, and amongst arts and music organisations and policy makers. At the heart of those discussions, we want to see questions asked about where we are heading, how we support all learners to realise their potential and what we want music education to look and sound like over the next ten years.

## Retuning our ambition for music learning: Outcomes for the 2020s



1. Leaders in schools and education are convinced and enabled to put music at the heart of their students' learning



2. Every school is supported to provide an effective music curriculum and the provision of a quality music offer is part of a key performance measure



3. The development of a diverse and skilled music education workforce is extended through enhanced training of specialist and generalist teachers, and support to enter the profession



4. Financial support is universally available to support music learners to progress beyond first access



5. More collaborative models of music education are established, involving support for and between schools and relevant partners to help students to progress in music



6. Parental engagement is supported as a priority from the earliest years onwards



7. Young people are informed and engaged in shaping their own learning pathways and are involved in the development of music programmes and initiatives



8. New, integrated approaches to the teaching and assessment of learning of music in the digital age are developed.

# What does it mean to make progress in music?

What it means to make progress in music is many-faceted. No two journeys, in and through musical learning, are the same. Nevertheless, everyone starts from an initial inspiring experience of music, either hearing or performing it.

For most learners, the progress they make is rarely linear. People start and stop. They move at different speeds. They find new inspiration from the people they meet and the music they experience. But making progress in music is founded on a solid grounding of how music works, an understanding what it is made of, and the job is to provide the knowledge, the core fundamentals of music so that young people can do something with it.

## Progress and Progression

**A) Progress - to make progress, to get better at something, to have greater depth of understanding or breadth of experience**

**B) Progression - to go from Whole Class Ensemble Teaching to a school band (etc.), then to an area band, then a music centre band, and so on. In other words, to make progress as in (A) above, and then avail oneself of progression routes.**

Professor Martin Fautley, Dr Victoria Kinsella, Dr Adam Whittaker. Birmingham City University

For some learners, the journey may develop from discussing and understanding the essentials of musical history and composition; for others with practical skills it will include a series of graded examinations in which, supported by a teacher, they prepare technical work, repertoire and supporting tests, working on a progressive mastery model. Many others will be making valuable progress in less formal or structured ways, through local performance opportunities, extra-curricular school activities, self-study, community music making and, experimenting with friends. Technology has made a mixture of these routes available to all.

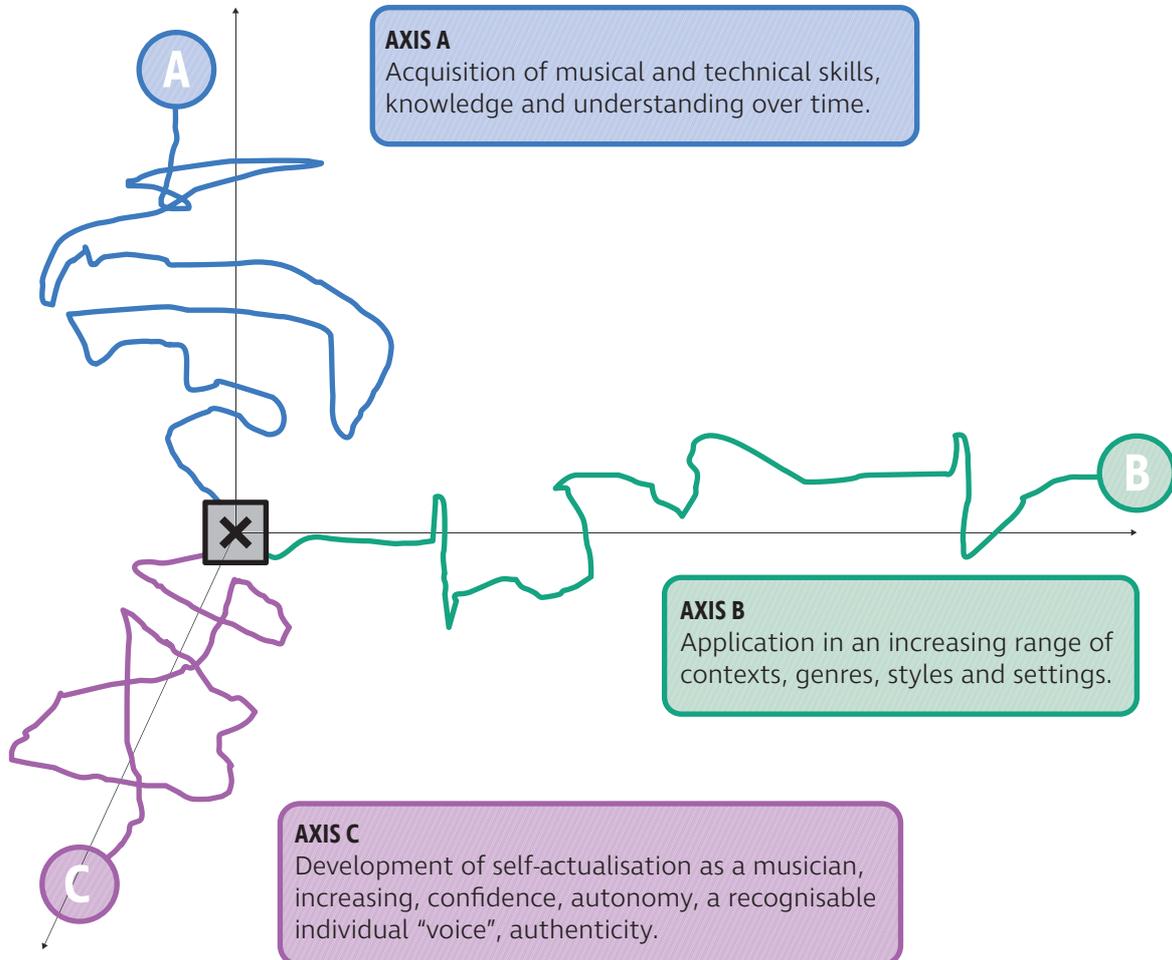
What can be said about each of these learners is that three developments in their musical progress are taking place, often simultaneously.

Firstly, they are acquiring musical and technical knowledge and skills, building their understanding of how to make music over time.

Secondly, they are applying their knowledge in an increasing range of contexts, genres, styles and pathways. In effect, they are utilising what they are learning in different settings, be that in class, with the tutor, with friends, at home, or in performance.

Thirdly, they are developing individuality as a musician. As they learn and apply their knowledge and skills, they gain confidence, become more fluent, and their own autonomy increases. They become recognisably themselves, and more assured, in the appreciation and making of music. These are the three axes along which progress in music is made, shown in the figure overleaf:

## The Three Axes of Musical Progression



To summarise, we have defined making progress in music as occurring along three axes:

**A. Acquiring musical knowledge and technical skills,** building an understanding of music, how it works, and how to make music over time

**B. Applying those skills in an increasing range of contexts,** genres, styles and pathways; utilising what is being learned in different settings, be that in class, with the tutor, with friends or in performance

**C. Gaining confidence and individuality,** becoming more fluent, and increasing autonomy. The learner becomes more recognisably themselves, and more assured, in the way they use their instrument and make music.

Seen in this way, it starts to become clear that learners acquire the knowledge of how music works precisely through varied opportunities to apply that knowledge in different settings, testing what they are learning in ways that inspire and work for them. For progress along these axes to take place what learners need is to find, and be guided to, the kinds of opportunities that enable them to achieve their potential in music. This guidance and those opportunities should be designed to create an environment in which the learner can make the best of their abilities and progress their music learning to the full.

# What are the conditions for effective progress to be supported?

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For musical progress to happen effectively, we have set out some conditions we believe should be in place. These conditions characterise, and help to define, the types and the quality of experiences that we believe learners should receive for their musical potential to be fully supported. It is the provision of these conditions that has helped to shape our thinking for the recommendations we make throughout this report:

- **Acquisition in the early years of a strong set of musicianship skills** - pulse, rhythm, pitch, expression, control, creativity, and a sense of performance, delivered using an aural/vocal approach, upon which everything else can be built
- **Immersion in a rich and inclusive music curriculum** that is taught skilfully, passionately, coherently, consistently and continuously over time, in a school where music and creativity are highly valued, prioritised and regularly celebrated
- **Access to a dynamic co-curriculum of instrumental and vocal learning**, with opportunities to learn, practice and perform in a range of ensembles and groups pursuing high standards in and out of school
- **Leadership from a skilled, well-trained and knowledgeable teaching workforce** both in and out of school, that can inspire learning, instil confidence, provide close technical and musical input, diagnose what support is required and takes time to listen and respond to young people's needs, aspirations and desires
- **A supportive environment for teachers** to receive best-practice training and continuous professional development to meet the ever-changing needs of schools and young people
- **More partnership** and listening to learners, parents, teachers, schools, and music organisations to understand individual needs and connect resources around the learner
- **Mutually-supportive** and resourced peer groups in which music making and sharing is regarded as a normal part of learning, friendship, community and everyday life
- **The positive support** and encouragement of parents and carers along the way, and not just in the early days of the learning journey
- **An understanding of the opportunities to make and learn music beyond school** formally and informally, and to where those opportunities might lead in the future
- **Access to a range of resources** such as equipment, instruments, time, finance, transport, venues; those necessary to explore, collaborate, acquire, consolidate, improve and use those skills, knowledge and understanding in and out of school
- **Increasing integration of the creative resources of musical organisations** into the provision of music services for all and to serve the needs required and sought by schools, learners and communities
- **Active support for the principle of partnership funding** and investment that can unlock new resources to support music learning projects.

# Retuning Our Ambition for Music Learning: Outcomes for the 2020s

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# 1. Leaders in schools and education are confident and enabled to put music at the heart of their students' learning.

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School leaders have a central role to play in providing the grounding and support for young people to progress their music education and in commissioning others to contribute to their development. We recognise that those school leaders who understand the power of music and its overall role in school life, with clear goals and ambitions for their students, are the ones that deliver excellent music provision. They also lead schools that not only produce the highest levels of academic attainment but also create vibrant school communities. There is increasing evidence suggesting that those schools that offer a rich music programme achieve better results than those that do not<sup>10</sup>. We see this pattern just as often in schools with fewer resources and more challenging socio-demographics.

We believe that, in the coming years, it is essential that school leaders have both incentives and compelling evidence to place music at the heart of their offer to their students and to be able to recruit and develop the specialist and generalist teachers who will enable music to flourish as a key curriculum subject and to support all students to achieve their musical potential.

However, unless a head teacher decides that music has a central place in the life of the school it can only happen on the periphery. In England, the introduction of EBacc is seen as one contributor that is quoted as a reason not to give music a central place. This is why leadership is so critical. We have reviewed a growing body of evidence suggesting that, in England, the introduction of EBacc is having a detrimental impact on equality of access to Music in secondary schools and on the numbers of young people taking the subject further, to GCSE and 'A' level. We firmly believe that Music should be a core curriculum subject, though we realise that this may not be possible in the short term nor will it alone solve the challenges we have set out.

**39%** of school leaders have had to cut back lesson time, staff or facilities for music 'A' level over the past two years.

Survey for the Association of School and College Leaders, 2018<sup>11</sup>

**A survey of over 13,000 American students** show high school students who participate in music achieve higher grades in English, Math, History, and Science than those who did not participate.

National Centre for Educational Statistics<sup>13</sup>.

**Students taking music for A-level** has dropped by 25.4% since 2014, compared to a decline of 2.6% in A-level entries overall. A 15.1% decline in the uptake of GCSE Music since 2016. In the past year, there has been a 7.4% drop in the number of GCSE entries in Music.

JCQA, 2018<sup>12</sup>.

Music as a school subject, therefore, must make a much more compelling case to all who benefit: students, parents, teachers, head teachers, school governors and government. It is also important that the case for music is made in language and terms that head teachers and school governors understand. Policy makers also appear to lack powerful, evidence-based arguments for the value and worth of music in terms of pupil development and school performance. We believe that, in the coming years, the music education sector, its organisations, advocates and practitioners, must redouble their efforts to promote the evidence for music as a force for personal, social and economic growth.

Meanwhile, those agencies that support music in schools and provide opportunities for music education to thrive in the wider community equally have a responsibility to seek continuous improvement and innovation in their offer to keep pace with the needs and expectations of those learning music in the 21st century. To do so, investment in the capacity and capability of their leadership will improve their effectiveness and ambition.

Leadership at all levels in music education is therefore key to music education continuing to succeed in and outside of our schools. Vision, enterprise and innovation will make the difference that we and others seek in returning the learning of music to the heart of every child's education. Musicians, ministers, civil servants, school inspectors, local authorities' governors, head teachers, school teachers, music organisations, local leaders, teacher trainers, parents, independent and peripatetic music teachers, institutions of higher and further education can, and should be encouraged and supported to take practical steps forward, however great or small. The challenges facing music education will not solely be addressed by new investment or demanding action of governments. It is a matter of leadership, and all stakeholders have a part to play.

## Our ten-year ambition would see:

- **National Centres for Leadership in Music Education**, established through the nomination of lead organisations in respective countries, working in partnership with teacher training bodies, institutions of tertiary education and wider leadership programmes in education to embed and develop leadership skills in the music education sector
- **The appointment national of Music Champions**, working with each of these Centres to promote music education, progression and quality in the teaching and learning of music; to encourage stakeholders to work effectively together; to advise governments on action they and others could take to encourage a more conducive environment for music education; and to motivate schools to place music and creative education at the heart of their offer
- **Music in Schools Awards**. The development of schemes, building on existing initiatives, to recognise and celebrate best practice in schools built upon simple and readily evidenced criteria such as having a specialist music teacher; an attached musician, composer or ensemble; engagement of the local music bodies in supporting progression; weekly timetabling of music within the core curriculum; extra curricula choirs and ensembles; and support for students and parents at points of transition.

Making music is a fundamental way that young people express themselves with all the attendant emotional and intellectual benefits that brings. But all too often these benefits are lost as musical opportunities are withdrawn as students progress into secondary school. Luckily, some schools get this right: we need to share the lessons.

Hasan Bakhshi MBE - Director, Creative Economy  
in Policy & Research, NESTA.

The Music Commission Panel member



## 2. Every school is supported to provide an effective music curriculum and the provision of a quality music offer is a key performance measure.

The pressures schools face in funding and provision, and the need to demonstrate achievement through results, is leading to an increasing focus on measurement, tests and outcomes. Government investment in music education has been substantial but, currently, assessment of a narrowly defined core curriculum, and a focus on examination results in those subjects as a desired outcome, has led to a visible and disturbing reduction in the attention given to arts and creative subjects including music in the secondary years. We note with concern that Music as an academic subject is disappearing from many state schools.

**24%** of people say that school, including teachers and the school environment, is the most important factor in the progress they made when learning music as a child.

The Music Commission survey by Walnut Unlimited (formerly ICM) 15-18 February, 2019<sup>14</sup>

We note research showing an increase in teaching Music for one term on a rotation with other subjects at Key Stage 3, leading to a reduction in Music curriculum time year-on-year<sup>15</sup>. The same research also shows an increasing number of schools where Music is now optional at Year 9 in England, despite it being in the National Curriculum. Between 2012/13 and 2016/17 Music as a compulsory subject for Year 9 students in all schools dropped from 84% to 62%. Whilst we believe that the amount of time given to Music in a year is crucial, it is also how Music is taught that enables pupils to develop their knowledge and skills and make progress.

School inspection is an important mechanism through which Music can be prioritised. In England, Ofsted is committed to the aim of a “broad and balanced education” and is consulting on the introduction of a new judgment for ‘quality of education.’ This development suggests that linking the way in which schools are rated with the quality and breadth of their provision of music and the arts can offer a compelling mechanism to secure a central role for the subject in schools.

Alongside assessment, we believe that there needs to be clearer guidance to schools on what a quality music offer looks and sounds like. At present, teachers in schools determine what content they can teach and what young people will learn. Definitions of quality in music education vary greatly and there appears to be a vacuum at a national level in how the “quality” of music education is assessed, judged, and monitored in schools. We believe that the Music curriculum should be determined locally through improved partnerships between learners, schools, communities, parents, music services and, in England, Music Education Hubs.

To this end, we want to see governments providing leadership, in partnership with appropriate education and music experts, by clearly defining quality standards and setting out more detailed guidance for young people’s development in music. This ambition would see governments convening experts and key music bodies in the development of model curriculum for Music, as is currently the case in England, to provide much greater clarity for teachers on what can be expected of children at different stages of their musical learning.

In our view, schools and teachers will benefit from more guidance and resources to teach the components of music, including the classic key elements of listening to music, active listening and responding; performance, both singing and playing and; creating music, improvising and composing. This, in turn, would support opportunities to learn, practise and perform in a range of ensembles and groups and the pursuit of high standards both in and out of school. This clarity on what good looks and sounds like, combined with assessment incentives, will do much to restore Music to the heart of a school’s offer to its students.

## Our ten-year ambition would see:

- **School inspection and assessment models acknowledging the importance of music,** cultural education and creativity that builds on prior knowledge and sets young people up to succeed in further study and life beyond. Schools that are judged “outstanding” or high performing should have a rich creative arts provision including music as part of their “broad and balanced” curriculum. This should be supported by a wider dissemination and transparency of best practice in music identified by school inspection services through periodic national reports and case studies
- **National curriculum models for the subject of Music** building on existing best practice to guide teachers and school leaders towards the specific knowledge and skills that music education should help students achieve at each stage of their musical learning. Music services and music organisations, and Music Education Hubs, providing increased support for the music curriculum in alternative settings, such as special schools, pupil referral units and hospital schools to ensure equity of provision
- **New contemporary materials to ensure that support for progress** is at the heart of music learning in schools. This will involve the development, by local and national partners and publishers in music and music education, of a range of high-quality tools and resources for schools that provide the guidance and clarity for teachers on how to teach and assess the fundamental components of music.

“  
Music making  
in all its forms is one of life's  
most rewarding experiences.  
Developing musicianship and  
technique within a supportive and  
sustainable framework (especially  
at critical transition points) is key  
to making progress and personal  
fulfilment.  
”

David Whelton OBE - Former managing director,  
Philharmonia Orchestra.

The Music Commission Panel member



### 3. The development of a diverse and skilled music education workforce is extended through enhanced training of specialist and generalist teachers, and support to enter the profession.

Making progress in music requires knowledgeable, skilled, and dedicated music teachers, be they in or out of schools. Throughout our inquiry, we heard of many superb and passionate music teachers who motivate and develop music learners. Too often, however, teachers are required to undertake musical guidance but lack the confidence and basic skills to help learners make progress. We believe there is an urgent need for a more skilled and diverse workforce to be in place in order for all music learners to realise their potential.

Strong early musicianship skills are critical to a learner's future success in music. Yet primary teacher training programmes in England and elsewhere, given their generalist nature, include a tiny amount of contact time with trainee teachers that focuses on their subject knowledge. Our own research supports existing findings<sup>6</sup> that the limited time devoted to specialist music training for primary teachers, combined with the lack of continuing professional development opportunities, may result in a lack of passion or confidence in teaching music.

**Only 8% of primary teachers in England report feeling confident about teaching music with just 16% were engaged in a professional network for music and 15% had regular opportunities for professional development. 32% of secondary teachers engaged in a professional network or had regular opportunities to participate in professional development.**

Music for All, Paul Hamlyn Foundation.<sup>17</sup>

We believe that there needs to be a significant shift towards in-service training for music teachers as well as the recruitment of specialist music teachers to address this deficit. To further incentivise musical skills acquisition at primary level, we also believe that making subject knowledge an expectation at application and interview stages should be considered.

This lack of focus on subject knowledge is also the case for secondary teacher trainees, where it is assumed to have been acquired through an undergraduate degree. However, many secondary teachers are now exploring a much more participatory and inclusive curriculum that has, at its heart, a diagnostic approach to find out what children can already do, what they can do next, and build programmes and opportunities for them to make progress. These are approaches that should be shared more widely among the music teaching community.

Most pupils do not see a distinction between academic study and instrumental or vocal learning that is undertaken elsewhere. We believe there are significant opportunities to realign expectations for teachers to consider both stretching young people's learning and experiences through both unfamiliar and familiar music that young people choose, and that teacher training in music should reflect this by enabling trainees to have experiences in out-of-school music learning contexts.

Critically, we also believe that entry into the music teaching profession must focus on ensuring a more diverse workforce; one that brings new ideas into the music education sector and reflects the diversity of those learners who may wish to progress. Opening up music teaching to people from a range of backgrounds would see new creative initiatives introduced, including apprenticeships and internships targeted at under-represented groups.

Outside of formal settings, there are currently no basic criteria, qualification or regulation in the UK for practising as an independent music teacher. This means that those learners able to afford private music tuition have no guarantee of the quality of the teaching they receive. Whilst there is an increasing appetite for continuing professional development among independent music teachers, there is anecdotal evidence of poor practice in the sector.

We have also found that secondary school and independent music teachers are often isolated with the range and quality of provision and support low for this specialist workforce. We believe that greater connection to peers and networks will help to transfer innovative practices and help create a more stimulating professional environment in which access to ideas, resources, and support are available to support learners to progress. We therefore believe that it is essential that better connections are forged across the entire music education teaching workforce.

## Our ten-year ambition would see:

- **A re-evaluation of the focus and content of initial teacher training (ITT) for music** to include more music training time allocated in PGCE courses and all music teacher training to have a focus on progression, including time for music in the proposed two-year PGCEs in England. Higher expectations of recruits to primary ITT, and more funding for specialist primary school music teachers
- **National and local music teacher networks**, to promote peer learning, guidance and support, with the aim of forging far more effective connections for classroom, peripatetic and independent music teachers and schools to support progress and build common purpose and understanding
- **Independent music teachers to be better valued as part of provision**, integrating them through voluntary registration and accreditation into music teaching focused on supporting progression, recognised by governments and music services
- **Every secondary school with at least one music specialist teacher** on its staff and initial teacher training for all primary school teachers, combined with improved programmes of accredited continuing professional development in music offered locally and nationally
- **The development of a diverse music education workforce** with support for a much wider range of young people to enter the teaching profession, in or out of school, with paid internships and apprenticeships.

Enabling people  
to be the best they can is about  
how we move forward as a society.  
It's an economic, cultural and  
social necessity.

**Professor Pamela Burnard** - Professor of Arts, Creativities and Education,  
University of Cambridge.

The Music Commission Panel member



## 4. Financial support is universally available to support all music learners to progress beyond first access.

Cost is a major barrier to many young people who wish to make progress in music. Against the backdrop of a reduction in music provision in schools, the onus increasingly falls on parents to pay for instrumental and vocal tuition, whether it be in school or in private tuition. This puts those who cannot afford such lessons at a serious disadvantage. It is our view that, if the future design of music education is intended to support every learner to achieve their musical potential, determined efforts must be made to provide the resources, through universal or targeted means, for all those who wish to continue their music learning. We strongly believe, therefore, that it should be the aim of policy makers and leaders in music education that, in the coming years, no music learner is excluded from realising their musical abilities because of cost.

**Families on lower incomes**, earning under £28k a year, are half as likely to have a child learning a musical instrument as families on higher incomes, earning over £48k a year.

Musicians' Union, September 2018<sup>18</sup>

Across the United Kingdom, the rising cost barriers mean that many young people are denied access to making musical progress because they and their families cannot afford the costs of tuition, instruments, travelling to lessons, ensemble rehearsals, and performances; many of which used to be provided within the educational and local authority system. Our own research has highlighted the reality that many children come from families which have neither the funds nor appropriate living circumstances to support music learning.

Especially outside urban centres many music activities involve travelling long distances, which can be a significant barrier to those children from low income and/or time-poor families. Even those families who may be managing better are increasingly finding the prospect of ongoing financial commitments to music making more difficult. Pupils from low income families face much steeper and wider economic challenges to access the ever-growing micro-economy of music education, such as instrumental and vocal teaching, compared with 10 years ago, because of prevailing and ongoing economic conditions. It is therefore too easy for learners, parents and carers to regard music lessons and experiences as nice-to-have extras that can be dispensed with.

Independent schools account for a disproportionately high number of 'A' level Music entries when compared against national entry statistics. This is clearly not about innate talent but has more to do with parental motivation, the importance these schools place on the place of music at the heart of the curriculum, and access to resources. Fee-paying parents clearly have the choice and funds to send their children to schools where they know their children will learn music. We think, however, that to improve access to progression routes in music it is essential that resources are focused on music learners in state schools who show aptitude and support their musical development.

We are aware that there are already significant resources in the music education sector, from statutory, voluntary and private sector sources. In our view, these resources could be more effectively deployed to target progression and those learners most in need of financial and other support. This requires research. However, the scale of the challenge now faced across the UK and beyond requires significant additional investment from statutory and other sources if making progress in the learning of music is to be universally accessible. We believe there is a need for commercial dialogue to explore how the private and philanthropic sectors can support the ambitions of this report. If not addressed with resolve and creative thinking, however, current trends hold an ever-growing threat that continuing a musical journey of learning will only be possible those from the most privileged of backgrounds.

## Our ten-year ambition would see:

- **Free school-based instrumental tuition for all.** In reviewing the structure and funding of Music Education Hubs in England and music services elsewhere, evaluate the available resources among education services, arts organisations and other relevant bodies to align and direct more funds towards progression. This should include guaranteed four-year agreements for the funding of Music Education Hubs and music services contingent on agreed key outcomes for inclusion and progression
- **The establishment of National Progression in Music Challenge Funds** and non-statutory and philanthropic financing opportunities open to schools and local and regional partners to pioneer and evaluate new approaches to supporting progression in music and developing local and regional ensembles
- **Music Premiums.** The introduction of government schemes to support music in primary schools, with funding for music in schools more effectively targeted at integrated first access and progression programmes and more active use of the Pupil Premium and comparable schemes to support disadvantaged pupils.



**Progress is like a ladder  
and we have to make the rungs  
on the ladder visible and accessible  
for people who want to climb and  
reach their potential.**

**Mary King** - Singer, educator, vocal coach, writer and broadcaster.

The Music Commission Panel member



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## 5. More collaborative models of music education are established, involving support for and between schools and relevant partners to help students to progress in music.

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A key finding of our inquiry into how progress in music can be better supported is that, despite recent developments, the music education sector does not have the coherence and connectedness to help music learners overcome the barriers they face. There are many superb, committed music organisations focused on supporting learners to make progress, and we also note that outward-facing schools and music departments; those building partnerships with specialist music organisations and individuals with the teacher acting as guide to a broader range of musical experiences, have a positive impact on learners' progression.

Yet, many music organisations and schools often work in isolation with the effect that the good practice that could work and be adapted elsewhere, especially for those who have poor access, fails to reach those who need it. The vast array of music services, private and independent music teachers, professional orchestras, community music organisations, higher education institutions, music exam boards, strategic national music organisations, and others, are simply not maximising the collective potential of their input and investment. What is missing is alignment across the range of music providers, both formal and informal, that focuses on progression. We therefore believe that much more needs to be done to build deep relationships and improve exchange between music organisations, communities and schools.

We believe that the goals of music organisations should be developed in collaboration with local authorities and education providers so that their resources are effectively devoted to serving the needs of schools and communities whose musical provision and progression routes they could most readily enhance. Conservatoires, for example, represent an aspiration for further musical study for many learners and this route for excellence can be made clearer as young people show promise. In England, National Portfolio Organisations delivering music have a vital role to play in inspiring young people, linking them to high quality performance and creative work.

**Pupils receiving Whole Class Ensemble Teaching** in England for less than one term has increased significantly, from 24,892 to 35,340 - a change of 41.97% over four years.

Arts Council England, 2017<sup>19</sup>.

We also believe that investment must be made in understanding the music resources available in a given area to enable these to be more effectively coordinated. Further, national strategies should be developed to ensure the opportunities provided by cultural organisations and their resources are better aligned and unlocked to support music provision especially in rural and sparsely populated areas.

Within the school systems, schools and teachers knowing what young people can do is a vital basis for delivering music education that is inclusive, diverse, and sufficiently stretching to enable them to progress. Yet too often there is little contact between phases of learning and schools to develop this knowledge. Weak transition arrangements between schools fail to build upon pupils' prior learning and lead to many pupils discontinuing their instrumental learning at the point of transfer. We therefore wish to see groups of primary schools working with destination schools to jointly plan for and resource music education programmes and learning experiences that complement what students are learning in school and involve a specific focus on how to sustain engagement over the transition period from primary to secondary school.

In primary schools, successive governments have taken significant steps in providing first access to music making for millions of children which, whilst successful in increasing participation, is rarely focused on helping learners progress. In our view, a re-examination of the progression pathways from first access whole-class instrumental teaching that many children experience in primary schools is required; one that makes the most of the resources available in the wider community.

We believe that there are many opportunities for greater sharing of specialist expertise and co-operation between groups of primary schools and between primary and secondary schools, especially outside of multi-academy trusts. At the heart of these partnerships, schools founding their commitment to providing musical opportunities for their students on sound programmes of support for progression beyond the first steps of engagement and a requirement for transition planning, including consistent records of musical progress that are kept and shared.

Amongst the many music organisations in a given area, including tertiary education institutions, all have a role to play in supporting local school partnerships in the development of their music provision, the training of both specialist and generalist teachers, and the evaluation and understanding of local progression pathways. The agenda for partnership should be set by a lead organisation, as is done by Music Education Hubs in England, which takes responsibility for understanding the needs of local schools and for engaging a range of partners to best provide for those needs. The lead should also promote the co-design of music education with local schools for the benefit of all children's musical progress.

## Our ten-year ambition would see:

- **National Music Education Plans** setting out national aims and expected outcomes, specifically setting a clearer framework for collaboration and implementation of local music education plans founded on partnerships working to deliver local progression strategies, engaging schools, music organisations, other education establishments and local musicians and independent music teachers
- **The establishment of Research and Knowledge Exchange Centres** for progression in music education, run in each country by existing academic and expert organisations and in England in partnership with Arts Council England, to generate research, promote best practice and innovation on the learning of music, funded by Research Councils, lottery funding, other charitable and philanthropic sources; working alongside and supporting the Music Champions to develop locally-available resources supporting progress in music
- **New schools' partnerships**, involving groups of primary and secondary schools, and bringing together networks of teachers, working together to define a locally-agreed curriculum to promote access, inclusion, diversity, progress and greater consistency in content and approach for pupils
- **Collaboration, alignment and partnership in support of local need** is a stipulation of the funding for arts and music organisations, including in England through Arts Council England, National Portfolio Organisations, recipients of project grants and Music Education Hubs. This will require building further on support from Music Education Hubs and others to ensure that learning provision by National Portfolio Organisations is closely aligned to local need and activity.



We have to get much better at spotting talent and then providing the support for it to flourish, much as they do in sport.

Sam Jackson - Managing editor, Classic FM and Smooth Radio.

The Music Commission Panel member



## 6. Parental engagement is supported as a priority from the earliest years onwards.

Musical achievement is linked to high levels of parental involvement; a crucial factor in whether a child persists or gives up. Research shows that children attaining high musical skills receive the most support from their parents, up to the age of eleven<sup>20</sup> after which they are increasingly driven by an intrinsic motivation to practise regularly by themselves.

In particular, parental engagement in the early years is a foundation and impetus for an interest and skills in music. Research shows that the years from birth to age six are the most important period for a child's musical development<sup>21</sup>. Parents' role in providing the stimulation and exposure to music, musical play and learning at home is instrumental in turning their potential into musical growth.

Beyond the early years, it is parents' and the wider family's continued support for their child's learning, particularly both in and out of school that matters. In primary schools where music is strong, well taught and well resourced, the gap between those children with good prior experience and those with little can often be narrowed. But this is not the case in all schools. This is why targeted support for parents throughout their child's musical learning is likely to have a significant impact on their motivation to support and commit resources to their child's progress in music. This support might begin with primary schools and involve communications with parents prior to the start of their child's primary education working with local pre-school providers and music services to encourage and support learning in the early years.

**A third of all  
7-10-year-olds** say  
they play an instrument, but  
only one in four is still playing  
at the ages of 16-17.

**Youth Music Survey by Ipsos MORI<sup>22</sup>**

In a separate study,<sup>23</sup> music learning outcomes including enjoyment, motivation, self-esteem and personal satisfaction with music lessons were found to be enhanced when parents sought their children's views on their involvement in music learning; discussed practising within parameters set by the teacher; provided a structured home environment for practice; took an interest in promoting good teacher-pupil rapport; communicated with the teacher in relation to the child's progress and; remained interested in their children's musical progress.

However, despite the evidence, many parents do not have enough exposure to information and arguments for the value of music for their child's development. Through our own research we have heard that the terminology of music is often not clear for many parents and that language around the subject is often too technical. Further, whilst there is a vast range and number of organisations, broadcasters and online resources focused on music making, many parents and learners do not know where they can go to find appropriate, high quality opportunities for their children to participate in and learn music. We believe that navigating these resources and supporting parents' understanding of which are best placed to serve learners' needs requires authoritative guidance.

Overall, we believe that a much higher priority placed on parental engagement with music in early years and beyond will bring significant benefits to learners' musical progress, both in and out of school. In our view, improving parental engagement to support learners' musical progress, therefore, requires national leadership and improved partnerships with broadcasters and the music industry in developing appropriate resources, more parent-focused information on the value of music education, making the subject more comprehensible and helping parents and families understand and access the options available for progress to be made.

## Our ten-year ambition would see:

- **Dynamic local and regional online Music Maps** that provide accessible tools and guidance for parents and learners to see the formal and informal opportunities available for them to develop their musical interests, broaden their experiences and make progress
- **The establishment of national and regional Early Learners' Music Forums** bringing together emerging initiatives and including broadcasters, online content developers and educationalists to support pre-school music learning and provide resources for parents, nursery schools and childminders
- **Targeted broadcast and social media information** enabling parents, carers and young people, led by schools in partnership with music organisations, to access authoritative guidance on the wider benefits of music and the value of music education for child development and well-being.

Through music we engage with society, cultures and each other. Exploring our musicality is about being in the world and being human.

**Nitin Sawhney CBE** - Artist, producer, songwriter, club DJ, broadcaster, multi-instrumentalist, and orchestral composer.

The Music Commission Panel member



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## 7. Young people are informed and engaged in shaping their own learning pathways and involved in the development of music programmes and initiatives.

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A series of white, overlapping wavy lines that flow from the bottom left towards the right, creating a sense of movement and rhythm.

For many learners, after the primary years, music education becomes much more about the exploration of music in social groups and at home. Sustained learning and musical progress tend to take place when young people have the motivation to learn<sup>24</sup> and this comes about when learners are in control of how learning happens. It is at this stage that, if school support is lacking or absent, formal and non-formal music education risks losing touch with many young people.

We believe that facilitating learning environments which depend on an interplay between teacher-led and young people-led activity are important in enabling young people to thrive as musicians. This should be considered both in individual sessions and across longer-term programmes of engagement with music, making space for young people to develop their own creative ideas and musical expression supported by informed guidance. This is about much more than asking young people what they would like to do and what music education programmes they would like to be involved in. It is about allowing young people to take the lead when they can and then supporting them when they need direction.

**Research shows that activities which are largely teacher-directed** make it hard for children and young people to engage in music-making post-compulsory education<sup>25</sup> and that increased student independence can lead to more effective learning<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, enabling supportive communities of young people who make music together is an effective agent in helping to develop their 'creative voice'. When the ongoing exchange between young people and teachers happens in a supportive musical community, learners are likely to become more confident, more engaged and more able to express themselves. We know that communities of young people, in ensembles and as role models, have the power to inspire, motivate, challenge and surprise each other in a way that stretches the possibilities of music making. For many, this is where musical innovation develops.

Clearly, new technologies have dramatically changed young people's opportunities and expectations for self-directed learning. We believe therefore that, whilst many strides have been taken in this area, for music education to remain relevant to learners there needs to be a fundamental culture shift towards the meaningful engagement of young people with the content and delivery of all music programmes wherever they take place.

The focus on formal learning and linear progression routes continues to inspire achievement in music across the globe, but music education could do more to recognise the achievements and progression routes of learners who are not involved in the exam system. Our research, which has sought the views of many

young people, has shown that learners' own musical interests, skills and aspirations are not sufficiently taken into account in planning and delivery of music education programmes.

Much of this is about knowing how to listen effectively. Giving learners more control over their learning is about educators and leaders focusing significant efforts on meeting learners where they are. This can ensure that music education better acknowledges and is responsive, rather than reactive, to the diverse needs and ambitions of young people and how they experience music.

Further, we note good emerging examples of where young people have been involved in advisory groups and strategic boards and provided with spaces to explore musical collaborations. A number of valuable models already exist that integrate young people into decision-making<sup>27</sup>, including pupil parliaments and young persons' councils. This is a start, but if music education is to remain relevant, inspiring and engaging in the coming years, we believe it requires a joined-up and policy-supported effort on the part of all those involved in music education. In the coming years, we believe that determined efforts must be made to ensure the learner's voice should be centre stage, and young people are empowered to shape their own paths to musical progress.

## Our ten-year ambition would see:

- **A requirement placed on music organisations to involve young people** and to act on their views to bring about a shift in music education culture; one that values young people's voices and, in appropriate cases, a grant condition for music organisations to consult and report on this involvement in their planning and programme delivery
- **Dedicated and youth-led spaces** provided for young people's learning in local centres and schools, supporting the creation and exploration of music equipped with the technology to connect young people in their music making and creativity
- **Best practice guides and case studies on the engagement of the voice of young people** in music education delivered through Research and Knowledge Exchange Centres for progression, including conducting regular national and regional surveys of the views, ambitions and musical aspirations of young people facilitated by arts councils, music services and other music education providers.

It's about making music less opaque, finding ways to get inside the process so that people can learn to make music for themselves and move from consumption to production.

Dr Sam Aaron - Research associate, Wolfson College, University of Cambridge, live coder and founder of Sonic Pi.

The Music Commission Panel member



## 8. New, integrated approaches to the teaching and assessment of learning of music in a digital age are developed.

The pace at which technology is evolving is rapid. The opportunities technology offers for learning, making and engaging with music are significant and, in our view, currently under-exploited.

The current generation of music learners can explore any era or kind of music at any time. Technology allows them to access and to merge “musics” from any culture. It enables the creation of digital spaces and forums and means that learners can improvise together, access virtual teachers and challenge each other via social groups, connecting and building networks for supporting their learning. When new technologies increasingly provide accessible, low-cost means to make music and assess progress; when they provide the tools to share music, collaborate and interact, we believe there should now be a central place for technology in supporting learners’ progress in music.

Because of the accessibility and immediacy that technology affords, young people have a much more fluid approach to musical tradition and learning. The barriers between genres and styles of learning no longer exist as they used to. For music education, technology opens up the opportunity to use sound in different ways. It is also providing an increasingly important means for creating music, with coding becoming as important a vehicle as notation for doing so. For young people, therefore, new technology increasingly provides meaningful tools; ones with which they are comfortable and adept that enable their understanding and production of music.

Young people are taking a DIY approach to music learning with **39% reporting that they are to some extent teaching themselves.**

Youth Music survey by IpsosS MORI<sup>28</sup>

However, throughout our inquiry, we found that technology is largely used outside of the formal teaching of music and that current models of learning do not maximise the opportunities that technology presents. Online music learning and teaching content is of variable quality, and it often does not meet learners' changing expectations and aspirations for progression. There is a danger that the "disconnect" between how young people use technology and music education may see current models of teaching rapidly becoming outdated. This is not about one replacing the other, but about bringing together the best in technology to work alongside and challenge acoustic music making to create more relevant contemporary practice.

Furthermore, developed appropriately, new technology could be one of the tools that prevents music from disappearing in schools. Given their accessibility and low cost, new technologies could enable schools to retain Music as part of the curriculum. In addition, music and technology may extend across the curriculum, building on existing interests, with song-writing and composing, for example, lending themselves as valuable vehicles to teach other subjects.

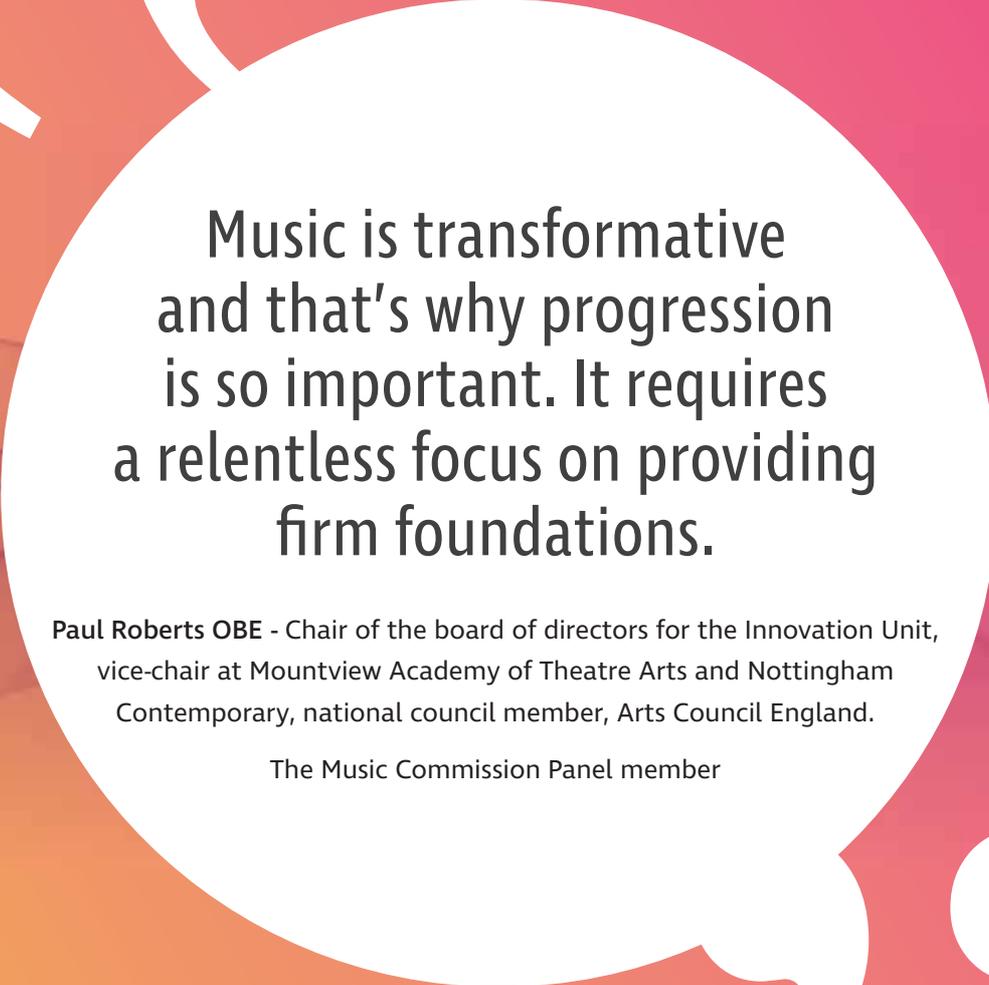
We also believe that new technology has the potential to make music much more inclusive, broadening the range of genres and engaging learners who may have a primary interest in video games, graphics and multimedia. Technology has proven to be an extremely useful tool in engaging students with special education needs and disabilities and has the potential to offer inclusive access to every student. Given that it does not need to be expensive, there is huge potential to extend the use of new technology and create music and cultural opportunities, integrated into a broad and balanced curriculum offer.

As a starting point, music educators need to build relationships with application developers and technology companies to ensure the content they want to teach is easily accessible and interactive, is of the highest quality and is integrated into existing learning and teaching processes.

The additional impetus we believe should be given to the use of technology in music education should come through better collaboration between technology companies, the music industry, publishing and the music education sector. This important shift will require the sector to engage digital leaders, and role models who connect with those who use these technologies, to integrate these innovations into the world of music education.

## Our ten-year ambition would see:

- **A UK Digital Research and Development Fund for music**, piloted through an organisation such as the Arts & Humanities Research Council, for music education, funding three-way partnerships between music organisations, tech companies and academic researchers to test new ways that technology can be used in music education, drawing on the lessons of the Digital R&D Fund for the Arts in England
- **A Technology in Music Competition**, piloted by the music industry, to showcase the most exciting uses of technologies in making music by young people across the UK. This to specifically lead to the creation of champions and role models – led by young people themselves - to connect learners to new technologies for music learning and teaching
- **A Music Education Digital Forum** spearheading new UK-wide partnerships with the music industry, tech companies and music educators to identify best practice, jointly develop standards and resources for the development of innovation in music education resources to catalyse the use of technology, develop support and tools for schools.



**Music is transformative  
and that's why progression  
is so important. It requires  
a relentless focus on providing  
firm foundations.**

**Paul Roberts OBE** - Chair of the board of directors for the Innovation Unit,  
vice-chair at Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts and Nottingham  
Contemporary, national council member, Arts Council England.

The Music Commission Panel member

# Putting our ambition to work: Next steps for music education

I would like to thank Sir Nicholas Kenyon and the Panel of The Music Commission for their expertise and insights which have provided inspiration and real vision for the future of music education and recommendations that, delivered with energy and commitment, will ensure all young people can take their music further and on to a lifetime of music making.

At ABRSM, we are committed to working with others to celebrate and support the development of music education in the UK and globally. As we reach our 130th anniversary, this guiding principle is the catalyst for our future development. Our history of pioneering and supporting musical progression and motivation to learn through graded music exams connects us to a modern-day commitment of providing new digital, physical and educational resources in support of learners and teachers.

However, in moving forward, it is our strongly held belief that a difference can and should be made by everyone involved at all levels. This centres on leadership in music education and, for ABRSM, it is an essential call to action if music education is to evolve and continue to be relevant in the future. Many leaders are showing how it can be done. We see it everywhere we go. Good music provision can flourish in schools. Whilst government funding or action is important, it tells us that providing a rich music offer is just as much about the commitment and desire to do it. In taking some of these recommendations, for example, Research and Knowledge Exchange Centres for progression in music that we propose, there is much we could learn from the What Works Centre initiative.

For The Music Commission's report and recommendations, we would like to make our own commitments. Year on year, we guarantee to monitor progress on the adoption and implementation of The Music Commission's recommendations. In doing so, we will publish an annual update looking at where progress has been made and what can be taken forward. Furthermore, we commit to convening forums that are as inclusive of all stakeholder views

in order to build consensus and coherence around shared ambitions for music education, as described in this report. If all young people are to achieve their musical potential, whatever their background or circumstances, it is essential that we build coalitions for change. We therefore aim to be a point of professional expertise for those wanting to join us in making a difference.

In the short term, later in 2019, we will publish the extensive and rich findings of The Music Commission's research programme. We believe that this research will add further to the positive debate and discussion we aim to generate around The Music Commission's report. In 2020, we will then publish our next major periodic research report, *Making Music*, which explores the detail of how and what music young people learn and emerging trends, to which we must adapt.

In delivering on The Music Commission's core aim, this year we are establishing a fund with our four Royal Schools partners to focus on driving a number of pilot projects across the UK to explore means of better supporting progression and social mobility.

Finally, I would like to add a word of thanks to Arts Council England, for their support to our research, and our discussions with The Durham Commission, both of which acknowledge that our work is part of a wider context in which we all assert the value of creativity as a force for personal and social development.



**Michael Elliott**  
Chief Executive, ABRSM.



We should be encouraging and enabling schools to invest in a rich and diverse music curriculum which has musical progression at its heart. This means ensuring that teachers and leaders in schools know what is needed at each stage of a child's musical development.

Carolyn Baxendale MBE - Head, Bolton Music Service,  
leader of Greater Manchester Music Education Hub.

The Music Commission Panel member

# Endnotes

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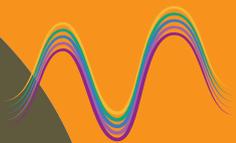
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<sup>28</sup> Ipsos MORI survey for Youth Music of 1,001 children and young people in England aged 7-17, conducted between 27 February and 9 March 2018



There is some great  
practice out there...[but]  
too often we are then failing  
young people – and ourselves – by  
not supporting them to progress and  
realise the personal, creative and  
economic benefits of the initial  
investment that we all make.

Sir Nicholas Kenyon - Managing director of the Barbican Centre.  
Chair of The Music Commission



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