

Conservative Music Education Taskforce

Interim Report: Schools in Harmony

**Submitted to Michael Gove MP and
Jeremy Hunt MP on February 24 2009**

1. Introduction

The UK music industry is one of the biggest in the world. Not only do we consume more music per head than any other country in the world, we are also the second largest exporter of music. British artists account for almost 10% of the vital US album market. British groups and artists like Coldplay, Radiohead and Robert Plant dominated this year's Grammy awards. On the classical front, London continues to support more large orchestras than any other city in the world and Brits like Sir Simon Rattle of the Berlin Philharmonic, lead the very best musicians in the world

If this success is to continue, the highest standards of music education are essential. Yet here there are some worrying gaps. More than a third of primary pupils who would like to play an instrument do not currently have the opportunity to do so. Provision in many state schools is far from adequate. Although there has been a raft of well-meaning initiatives from ministers, from the Music Manifesto to Creative Partnerships, there is little clear sense of direction as to how gaps in provision will be addressed.

This interim report does not seek to replace or supercede the thinking that has already happened. It does however propose a simple idea to act as a practical focus and spotlight for the work done to date, namely the establishment of an annual National Music Week.

This week will combine the efforts and energy of teachers, pupils, parents, schools, community groups, the music industry, broadcasters and all those wishing to improve grassroots music education provision. The intention is to offer a week long festival of music throughout the country, focused but not exclusively targeted on school music. This would culminate in a televised national competition to find the finest school orchestra.

We propose that the week should also include:

- Promotional materials highlighting government and industry schemes in order to improve take up amongst these initiatives.
- Educational material provided by the music industry on music writing, performing and intellectual property.
- Visits to schools by UK artists.
- Performances and workshops at schools by the 11,000 local music groups from across the country.
- Links to the BBC's youth music competitions including Young Musician of the Year and Radio 3's Choir of the Year using

former winners to promote these competitions and encourage entries from as many children and schools as possible.

- Performances and visits by the British Orchestras as part of their pledge to reach every school child.
- Encouragement of local and regional school music competitions to support competition at a national level.

We accept this is simply one initiative and appreciate concerns about “initiativitis,” especially in the education world. However we believe a National Music Week would act as a focal point for the many other plans being considered and would be complementary to them. Our final report will look more broadly at other aspects of music education.

2. Music education: the record to date

In 2001 the Government promised that, 'in time', all children of primary school age would have the chance to learn a musical instrument¹. This is a bold aim and one to be applauded. However, using official figures and Government estimates it is still the case that, despite this pledge, more than a third of primary pupils who would like to play an instrument do not currently have the opportunity. That 34% equates to approximately 1.44 million children missing out.

Whilst tangible improvements can be seen in the proportion of Key Stage 1 pupils enjoying specialist musical tuition², the percentage of KS2 students receiving such tuition has stagnated since the Government made its promise.

<i>Academic year</i>	<i>KS1 pupils reported as receiving specialist instrumental or vocal tuition</i>	<i>KS2 pupils reported as receiving specialist instrumental or vocal tuition</i>
2001/02	Unavailable	12%
2004/05	2%	13%
2006/07	4.5%	13%

Less than 500,000 5-14 year olds are receiving music tuition and just 1 child in 12 chooses to take a GCSE in music.

There is better news when it comes to whole class tuition. The Wider Opportunities initiative has succeeded in increasing the proportion doing music education, especially at Key Stage 2 level.

<i>Academic year</i>	<i>KS1 pupils reported as being involved in wider opportunities activities</i>	<i>KS2 pupils reported as being involved in wider opportunities activities</i>
2003/04	Unavailable	8%
2004/05	Unavailable	10%
2005/06	5%	22%
2006/07	7.7%	32.6%

¹ Statement by David Blunkett, Education Secretary (*Hansard*, 12 February 2001: Col. 23)

² Figures contained in table sourced from *Hansard*, 19 November 2007: Col. 636-637W; and DCSF publication: *Local Authorities Music Service Provision for Key Stages 1 and 2* (21 November 2007)

The Arts Council has also worked successfully in this area. Their Take It Away scheme, for instance, has provided interest-free loans for more than 16,000 people in priority groups to buy musical instruments. More importantly, the £10 million in Lottery funds that is distributed each year by Youth Music supports the development of young musicians across all genres.

Some clear barriers to increasing specialist music tuition exist, including a lack of high level teaching skills. Here the government's record has been much more patchy. Over 2000 teachers were supposed to benefit from the £2m music teacher training programme announced in 2006 to support professional development. 2 years on just 304 teachers have completed the course.

The 'Creative Sparks' initiative launched in 2005 also flopped. It aimed to ensure that all children, by the age of 16, would have 'performed music live to an audience.' It has now been subsumed into the Find your Talent initiative.

Whilst schemes like Wider Opportunities and Sing Up have been more successful at introducing music to children of a young age, the overriding sense is of a scattergun approach to music education with initiatives often lacking time to 'bed-in'. The result has often been disjointed with substantial variations in different parts of the country.

3. Recommendation: National Music Week

This proposal is broadly based on the Fête de la Musique, the highly accessible local music festival launched by the French Ministry of Culture over 25 years ago. Concerts take place in any available space, from town centres, castles and parks to museums and train stations and major music institutions are encouraged to perform outside of their usual environs. All participants are encouraged to join in, be they amateur or professional with no charge for the public.

Our week would focus on education institutions and encourage schools to work together with amateur and professional groups. Schools would open up their facilities and music groups would perform in school playgrounds and halls throughout the week.

These events would be used to broaden support and take up of music education initiatives such as the music teacher training fund, Take It Away and UK music's Quickstart Programme. Local authorities would also be able to provide information on local music groups, lessons and facilities.

In different areas of the country events will obviously and rightly vary in scope and structure. This kind of week long festival depends on local initiative and it will be essential not to stifle it with "top down" direction. Some areas might use the week to draw audiences to historic sites and museums. Others might focus on outdoor provision. Others again might focus on opening up school and college venues.

For the programme to succeed on the scale envisaged, there will need to be a partnership between key national and local organisations committed to musical development, understanding and appreciation. We therefore propose inviting a panel of influential individuals and organisations to plan for the week-long festival. This would include local authorities, composers, artists, public service broadcasters, voluntary organisations and music industry representatives and would be given the task of planning the direction and implementation of the National Music Week programme.

Music industry involvement

In October 2006 the music industry held a National Music Week that aimed to put music in the spotlight at schools. This was a one off event however, and it focused too heavily on commercial results. Its main aspect was a Schools Top Ten compiled by children spending a voucher on songs from one of ten new UK acts.

More successfully the industry provided educational material to 2,000 schools reaching 1.3 million pupils. The industry has indicated a willingness to do a similar event without the commercial angle. Educational material would help teachers from all disciplines use music in their lessons during the week as well as provide dedicated music lesson materials such as song writing support and information on copyright protection.

UK artists would also visit schools during the week to perform and talk about their experiences in the music industry. It is hoped that hearing about how they started their careers these visits will encourage children to take up playing an instrument.

Local music groups and ensembles

The involvement of local music groups, working together with school choirs and orchestras, will be essential. Such groups provide the opportunity for children to continue an interest in music when they have left school and reduce the music drop out rate of school leavers. They would also use National Music Week to offer concerts of their own as well as those linked to school provision.

Media and broadcasters

The BBC already does a great deal of work to promote interest and take up in music education. The Young Musician of the Year competition is an excellent example of this, alongside Radio 3's Choir of the Year. The Proms too has been highly successful in promoting classical music to new audiences. It is hoped the BBC and other broadcasters might be willing to support a National Music Week in the same way.