

Dear Culture Committee

I am writing to you with regards to the proposed closure of the junior department of the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. My Senedd petition calling for its protection recently closed with over 10,000 votes; this is clearly a matter of great concern to the people of Wales and further afield.

You may already know that RWCMD announced the proposed closure in May, to cease all activity from the end of the current term. Our time to fight this is limited, indeed the consultation period has already closed and a final decision has been timetabled to be made by the end of 19th July.

The YRWCMD provides the highest level of tuition in music and drama to 400 students under the age of 18 at weekends during term time. It represents the top of the pyramid of pre-tertiary education in the subjects in Wales, enabling those musicians and actors who may wish to work in the professions to pass from the wonderful lessons given within the National Music Service and equivalent drama teaching into higher education. The National Music Service is already working at capacity and cannot replace what the YRWCMD offers. The building and its facilities are integral to enabling these students to gain the skills they need to progress to the next level of training. There is a top level concert hall and theatre, soundproofed teaching rooms, and the highest quality Steinway pianos in every room. Nothing else in Wales comes close to this. Indeed pupils travel from Pembrokeshire, Camarthenshire, and even from across the border in Somerset and Oxford to access these facilities alongside the best quality teaching, provided by some of the many world class professional musicians and actors who work in and around Cardiff.

I am a violin teacher at the YRWCMD and also a member of the orchestra of Welsh National Opera. Cuts at WNO leave me in no doubt about the financial struggles we are all feeling in the arts at the present time. However I firmly believe that by removing this pathway from entry level music and drama teaching into higher education that Wales will be contributing to the loss of its future as a world leader on the arts stage. This tiny country I have become so proud to call my home over the last decade must now start to fight for the continuation of its reputation as the land of song.

The RWCMD tell us that they can no longer afford to "subsidise" a junior department. I would argue that as a department initially set up for the benefit of Wales's children, that they should have future-proofed its existence by establishing a healthy funding model. The RWCMD junior department's founder tells me the current model (which is jointly funded by fees and the college's reserves) was only ever intended to be temporary. It does seem that Wales struggles to gain the equivalent funding to other junior conservatoires because education is devolved. In England, junior conservatoire music students have access to the Music and Dance Scheme which provides up to £3000 for up to forty students. This is matched in Scotland, but not here in Wales. The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music provides enormous sums to all the other Royal colleges of music for their junior departments (apparently the Royal Academy of Music in London gets £1million each year) - but not the RWCMD. The deficit for running the YRWCMD in the current year stands at £200,000. I firmly believe that the department could be a sustainable part of the

RWCMDs offering with some modest funding. Why should Welsh children be unable to access this important provision when it is available to their English and Scottish counterparts?

With many thanks to you all for your tireless fight for Welsh culture in these difficult times,

Yours sincerely  
Rebecca Totterdell