

**Senedd Debate on Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama Junior Department, Wednesday  
18 September**

**Summary**

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Like many so many UK higher education institutions, the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama is facing significant financial pressure due a number of factors including inflation and capped tuition fees. The unprecedented strain on public finances all round has seen a reduction in public funding to the College (6% for 2024/25). We are taking steps to cut costs including a 10% reduction in spending, equating to £1.5 million in 2024/25.

In July 2024 after much consideration and with regret, the College made the decision to close its weekend weekly music and drama provision for under-18s, contributing 16% of the total savings of the overall 10% savings needed. We acknowledge both the powerful individual stories of some of our young participants and the public concern that has been expressed through our consultation period, demonstrating how much people in Wales care about the role of music and drama in the lives of our young people. However, this move was driven by financial necessity. This decision has impacted around 180 young musicians and 160 young actors.

**Continuing projects**

In 2024/25 we will continue to deliver sustainable project work in this field. This will include a series of weekend immersive music workshops seeking to inspire participation from beginners through to emerging professionals (supported by the Mosawi Foundation); the National Open Youth Orchestra Ensemble Residency (in partnership with BBC NOW and Open up Music); and holiday courses in Production Arts (which continue to be sponsored by Bad Wolf).

**A partnership approach:**

Given the continuing financial challenge, we recognise the need to think and work differently. RWCMD is now scoping a new partnership approach to support outstanding talent from right across Wales, developing sustainable models in music and drama that will best serve young people from all backgrounds.

We are planning to work closely in partnership with key national organisations: National Youth Arts Wales (NYAW), the National Music Service for Wales (NMSW), the Urdd and Seren, and constructive discussions have already begun. We will also consult with diverse stakeholders including young people themselves, FE providers, youth organisations and youth theatres, music services and industry partners. We expect that this work will result in proposals towards the end of this academic year, 2024/25, for a new national talent development programme, with partnership at its heart and co-ordinated by the College.

We are determined to create a positive future with opportunities for young people that they value. And we are hopeful that the position with public finances will start to improve in the next few years and new investment will become possible.

As we build on early constructive discussions towards a new national talent programme for young people in Wales based on partnership, we will continue to consider the proposals that we received as part of this consultation process, including those from both staff and students.

A period of review, in 2024/25 will enable collective thinking to develop proposals for a national talent programme in music and drama for the whole of Wales. This will be underpinned by three key principles:

1. **Equity of access** across the regions of Wales, through both English and Welsh language, and in terms of economic background
2. **A partnership approach**, extending and deepening the reach and impact of existing provision, and ensuring pathways right through to professional training and professional practice
3. **A sustainable financial model**

Although music and drama are different in terms of young people's needs, there are likely to be three shared pillars in approach:

1. **Inspiring, immersive and inclusive experiences** that challenge the most talented young people to reach higher levels, experience the processes and values of professional contemporary live music and theatre/film making, and perform/showcase work in high quality venues and facilities.
2. **Mentorship** through a network of both industry professionals and top teachers across Wales, and peer mentorship through conservatoire and university students as emerging professionals.
3. **Attention to fundamental craft development at an appropriate level** (including relevant instruments and tools), and the challenge and support to reach excellence.

17 September 2024