

14<sup>th</sup> October 2024

Dear Petitions Committee and Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership

**14.10.24: Item P-06-1455 Protect the junior departments of the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama from closure**

Thank you for your discussion today about RWCMD's decision to close its junior music and drama departments in July.

I am writing as the former head of RWCMD's junior music department and as a founding lead for the junior drama department, currently known collectively as Young RWCMD. I ask that the committee urgently reconsiders its decision to close this petition, as no solution has yet been found to address the new gap in provision for young people left by the closure of Young RWCMD, a gap which has left too many to cope alone with the loss of the only conservatoire-based centre of advanced training for young musicians and actors in Wales.

Rebecca's time-limited petition achieved over 10,000 signatures. Each signature represents an individual from Wales and beyond who has explicitly asked the Petitions Committee to protect this valuable opportunity for children, and who continue to follow progress towards this closely.

I also draw the Committee's attention to the hundreds of public statements of concern about the closure made throughout the summer, including from organisations such as the Musicians Union and the Incorporated Society of Musicians. Many of these statements represent the wider arts education sector and illustrate the shock and anger that the avoidable closure provoked then and continues to provoke now, undiminished.

Similarly, many salient and heartfelt statements were made last month during the excellent Senedd debate on the department's closure. This debate provided the rationale and momentum for the Senedd to commission an action plan towards an acceptable solution to addressing the gap left behind, a plan that could for example include commissioning a review into advanced training for Wales' school-age musicians and actors, and scoping the funding required to remove financial barriers and ensure access for everyone who can benefit. This is surely the least we could do to give these young people their due consideration, and to work towards some kind of parity with those living in England and beyond?

May I also draw a comparison with youth sports in Wales. The skill level of many of RWCMD's former junior learners is of national level. The skill of some is equivalent to representing Wales in the Olympics. Instead of proudly and publicly supporting, celebrating and funding these amazing young people, we face a situation in which their opportunities are eroded, and solutions to this problem appear too far out of reach to grasp.

Now is the time for us collectively and collegially to

- evolve national discourse and action planning for youth music and drama training in Wales
- ensure that the young people themselves are placed front and centre within this
- acknowledge music and drama as the essential part of everyday human life that they are
- acknowledge youth music and drama training as the essential parts of the Welsh education infrastructure they deserve to be .. and protect them accordingly.

In light of the impact on young people's wellbeing, rights, education, culture and future opportunities caused by the loss of Young RWCMD, I ask that the Petitions Committee, other relevant committees and the Cabinet Secretaries

- continue to gain insights into the background to the closure of Young RWCMD
- clarify an appropriate plan to reinstate or adequately replace this much-valued provision
- keep the petition open until these outcomes are achieved.

Thank you so much for your ongoing time and attention to this matter.

Best wishes

Patricia Keir

*cc Rebecca Totterdell*

*Rhianon Passmore MS, all members Cross Party Committee – Music*

*Delyth Jewel MS, all members Cross Party Committee – Arts and Health*

*Julie Morgan MS*

*Jenny Rathbone MS*