

The Musicians' Union (MU) has around 20,000 members who teach music, and is therefore well placed to offer insight into music education across Wales, including how the current situation and any possible changes compare to the rest of the UK. This submission sets out a few crucial aspects of music education that must be considered by the Committee as part of their inquiry.

Firstly, the ultimate goal of music education in Wales should be that all children have access to affordable, high-quality musical tuition and opportunities, across all genres of music and all areas of the country. However, this is not the current situation, as there are differences in provision across the country, while music services and teachers face significant pressures. Music education must be based on equal support for all genres of music as well as children's needs, with a focus on diversity and inclusion, so that young people with special educational needs and in deprived areas have the same opportunities as those in wealthier areas. The Committee should consider the extent to which provision varies across Wales and how to ensure that the situation improves.

Secondly, funding and business models are fundamental issues for the successful delivery of music education, as they affect every other part of the system. Music education in Wales is still largely delivered by local authority music services, but this model is under pressure due to lack of funding as well as additional challenges, such as the rural and deprived nature of much of Wales. There are alternative business models for music education, as highlighted by the MU's series of Hub Reports – examples include the Denbighshire Music Co-operative and, in England, the Cornwall Music Service Trust. However, the lack of ring-fenced, long-term funding for music education in Wales is a major issue, and greater resources are needed to deliver the vision set out above. The Committee should consider how to ensure the right resources and structures are in place for the successful delivery of music education.

Finally, it is crucial that the Committee considers the current state of the workforce, and how to provide better support for music teachers, without whom no music education would take place. The MU's members who teach tell us that they get an immense amount of satisfaction from what they do to inspire the next generation of musicians. However, good pay and conditions, as well as professional recognition, is just as important for music teachers as for other workers, and over time there has been a gradual erosion of rates of pay and conditions, as well as a move towards self-employment. Music education is only possible with a committed, skilled, and creative workforce, and unless teachers are supported and appreciated then unfortunately it is the quality, affordability, and accessibility of children's music education that will suffer. The Committee should consider how best to support music teachers in delivering high-quality, affordable, and accessible tuition across Wales.

Wales is rightly proud of its musical heritage, and there is still a variety of quality music-making taking place. However, this is not consistently affordable and accessible for children across the country, which will only be possible with the right strategy, along with appropriate funding and well-supported teachers. Issues of accessibility, funding, and the workforce must be considered in the Committee's inquiry to ensure the viability and success of music education in the future.