

Delivering Excellence in Teaching Arts in Schools

7 October 2021

Thank you for inviting me to deliver the keynote speech on supporting creative subjects in the school curriculum.

The Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM) is the UK's professional body for musicians. We are also the subject association for music. Since 1882, we have been dedicated to promoting the importance of music and supporting those who work in the music profession. We support over 11,000 members across the UK and Ireland many of whom work in music education, who have continued to provide music education throughout the pandemic.

We know the importance of the creative arts. There is clinically significant evidence that children who participate actively in the performing arts spend less time sitting in front of a computer screen playing games and therefore are at less of a risk of developing health problems. Children who spend more than two hours a day on screen related pastimes are at a high risk of developing health issues, such as obesity. They can also become socially isolated and lose the ability to empathise, to communicate and to learn emotional intelligence.

Singing is also an aerobic exercise that improves the efficiency of the cardiovascular system, increasing the oxygenation of the blood and improving alertness. It is linked to the alleviation of stress and promotes longevity and general health. Singing as a group improves children's behaviour. It helps them bond – whatever the song or language. They can express their feelings of joy or excitement, of being scared or proud. Musical activity involves many different parts of the brain, so singing (which involves music and language) helps develop these areas, as neurological studies from the UK, Germany and the US have found.

In many cultures, music, singing and dance have no clear divisions – they are seen as a whole activity. Indeed, in many African cultures, there are no separate words for singing and dancing or music. Through dance, children develop spatial awareness, become less clumsy and pay more attention to others sharing their space. Children

struggling with language can express their feelings with immediacy through dance and movement.

There is plenty of research which shows the amazing impact that studying music has in terms of other output. Research by the University of Kansas has shown that students in schools with high quality music education programmes scored around 22% higher in English and 20% higher in Maths compared to schools with low quality music programmes, regardless of socio-economic disparities among schools or schools' districts.

And of course, Sue Hallam's key work, *The Power of Music*, highlighted the positive impact access to high quality classroom music education has on listening skills, awareness of phonetics, literacy, and special reasoning which supports the development of certain mathematical skills.

If the UK, post-Brexit, is going to be an 'international trading nation', children and young people must be educated for the industries of the future. According to a study by researchers at Oxford University and Deloitte:

"In the future, businesses will need more skills, including: digital know-how, management capability, creativity, entrepreneurship and complex problem solving."

Given that about 35% of current jobs in the UK are at high risk of computerisation over the next 10 to 20 years, music is going to be critical in this new world.

Where future jobs will come from was covered in the evidence of Andreas Schleicher, director for education and skills at the OECD on 26 February 2019 to the Education Select Committee. He said: -

'In the fourth industrial revolution, art may become more important than maths. We often talk about soft skills as being social and emotional skills, and hard skills as being science and maths, but it might be the opposite. The

science and maths might become a lot softer in the future, where the relevance of knowledge evaporates very quickly, whereas the hard skills might be your curiosity, leadership, persistence and resilience.’

He talked about the strengths of British students, saying we were better at tasks that ‘are more associated with the past than the future. The kinds of things that are easy to teach and easy to test are precisely those things that are easy to digitise.’ In his view, the greatest weakness in UK schools is that we are teaching routine cognitive skills and not focusing on non-routine analytic skills, such as problem solving and making judgements. The ISM supports the evidence presented by Andreas Schleicher and would agree that creative subjects must be placed at the heart of a child’s education if we are to make the most of the fourth Industrial Revolution and not become a victim of these technological changes.

A poll conducted for the ISM found that 85% of adults backed the statement that ‘Music education must not become the preserve of those children whose families can afford to pay for music tuition.’ And yet the introduction of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) in 2010 has contributed to the decline in music education and the other arts subjects. The EBacc is a headline accountability measure for schools in England and was first introduced by then-Education Secretary Michael Gove in 2010 to address our poor showing in the PISA tables.

It was based on the Facilitating Subjects for choosing degree courses as selected by the Russell Group. However, the Russell Group has now dropped the concept of Facilitating Subjects and said that **it had been “misinterpreted” by people who believe these are the only subjects that top universities will consider**. So with the facilitating subjects being dropped by the Russell Group the reason for the EBacc has disappeared.

The EBacc excludes creative, artistic and technical subjects such as Music, Drama and Design and Technology. At Key Stage 4, schools must **offer** at least one subject from the arts, design and technology, humanities and modern foreign languages. However, the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) accountability measure does not include arts subjects.

GCSE Subjects	2014	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Art and Design subjects	177371	162348	166325	182204	190725	195578
Design and Technology	200133	153929	116774	89903	89037	81774
Drama	71399	61703	57987	57704	57881	56739
Media/Film/TV Studies	59536	44865	41832	36437	34711	32528
Music	42668	38376	35531	34725	34686	35202
Performing/Expressive Arts	19607	14704	8611	9273	8996	8688
Total	570549	475925	427060	410246	416036	410509

(England only)

The fall in Arts uptake at GCSE over 2014 – 2021 is really quite startling:

All Arts subjects – 28%

Design and technology: 59%

Drama: 21%

Music: 17%

Many of you will have seen a narrowing of the curriculum in Key Stage 3 with schools moving to a two-year model rather than a three-year one, or arts subjects being placed on a carousel system.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Music Education published the State of the Nation report in February 2019 which exposed the crisis facing music education in England. Jointly authored by Dr Alison Daubney (University of Sussex), Gary Spruce (Birmingham City University) and the ISM, the report demonstrated that music is fast disappearing from our schools. For A-Level music, the entries fell by 43% between

2010 and 2020. 'The new normal is that fewer arts GCSEs are studied across England's schools than a decade ago.'

The EBacc and Progress 8 disincentivise schools to offer Arts subjects. Progress 8 was introduced in 2016 and, according to the government, 'aims to capture the progress a pupil makes from the end of primary school to the end of secondary school'. The measure compares pupils' key stage 4 results in 8 subjects to those of other pupils nationally with similar prior attainment. Pupils' individual Progress 8 scores are calculated solely in order to calculate a school's Progress 8 score. The subjects included in the measure are English, maths, 3 further EBacc subjects (science, languages, humanities) and 3 non-EBacc subjects. The non-EBacc subjects can either be GCSEs or other equivalent qualifications on a DfE approved list.

Many schools have moved to a two-year Key Stage 3 to enable pupils to cover the sheer amount of content in EBacc subjects, further eroding curriculum music. Research by Ofstedⁱ found that around half of schools had moved to a two-year Key Stage 3 model which had resulted in the marginalisation of practical and creative subjects. This has led to inequalities of opportunity for many pupils. The most recent research by the ISM found that 25% of responding secondary school music teachers reported that pupils were not receiving classroom music throughout Key Stage 3 as a continuing result of the EBacc.ⁱⁱ

The Department for Education report on the Call for Evidence on the NPME, carried out in early 2020 but released in August 2021, found that *'For those young people who wanted to study a music qualification but were not able to, a number of them said that they felt under pressure to choose other subjects instead or that music was not available as a GCSE or A-level option at their school.'*ⁱⁱⁱ

The Ofsted Research Review: Music, published in July 2021, also acknowledged the narrowing of the curriculum at Key Stage 3 and the decline in uptake of music courses at Key Stages 4 and 5 but stopped short of recognising the EBacc as a fundamental cause of this:

And lack of funding also plays a role in all of this. The *Music Education: State of the Nation* (January 2019) report noted that one of the driving factors “hav[ing] a negative impact on curriculum music provision in primary schools...[include] cuts to funding which have forced some schools to no longer employ specialist music teachers¹”.

Another factor noted was that “The prevalence of singing in primary schools has also diminished since the central funding for the National Singing Programme...was cut”. For Secondary Schools, the report cited evidence that “Secondary teachers are striving to do more with less funding. And the number of staff in school music departments is shrinking. This is having a detrimental effect on the quality and reach of provision and the mental health of music teachers.”

Although government funding for Music Education Hubs has gradually increased since 2014/15 from £58 million to £79 million in 2021 (a drop of £1 million from 2020), this has at most accounted for just under 40% of the total income for hubs (in 2018 – the most recent annual survey available). Predominantly schools and parents have had to make up the shortfall, along with other sources such as Local Authorities and donations.^{iv}

The Arts Premium was a 2019 Conservative Manifesto commitment^v and £90 million promised in the 2020 budget.^{vi} It is described in the budget as:

‘£90 million a year to introduce an Arts Premium from September 2021, averaging out as an extra £25,000 a year per secondary school for three years. The funding will help schools to provide high quality arts programmes and extracurricular activities for pupils, including those delivered in partnership with arts organisations, as well as supporting teachers to deliver engaging and creative lessons in the arts.’

But it is not certain whether it will materialize since it is now subject to this year’s Spending Review.^{vii} So we don’t know what will happen to it.

¹ All-Party Parliamentary Group for Music Education, *Music Education: State of the Nation*, January 2019, available at: <https://www.ism.org/images/images/FINAL-State-of-the-Nation-Music-Education-for-email-or-web-2.pdf>

We know that arts subjects are in decline and have been for many years – the number of entries each year speak for themselves – but we also know that there are other factors at play, many of which occur outside of the classroom. Anyone who has worked in a school with a diverse intake will recognise the conductor, composer and performer Anita Datta's analysis that 'The obstacles facing our students from working-class and impoverished backgrounds are quite different from those of their middle-class counterparts.'

Lack of space, lack of parental support and encouragement, parents working shift work, caring responsibilities or looking after siblings can all limit a young person's ability to engage with and enjoy after school clubs, instrumental lessons or even continue studying a subject. Research into musical participation and school culture (Underhill, 2015) found that if the parental view of learning music at school was negative then the child's view would also be negative and this could affect the pupil's engagement in school music, the value they placed on music as a school subject and the decision to continue music education at Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5.

Research has also shown the influence that teachers and peers can have on pupils, in addition to pupils' perceptions of their own abilities in the subjects they choose to study. For example, teachers contribute to pupils' self-perception and challenge them to be successful in their academic studies. Pupils who view teachers as role models have more positive attitudes to school and higher levels of motivation. Peers act as confidantes and can play a significant role in influencing pupils' values and attitudes towards subjects.

There are a number of studies which have shown that pupils' perception of GCSE music in particular is problematic. Many pupils perceived it to be 'more difficult' than art or drama, elitist, a specialist subject only accessible to those who played an instrument and not a subject which was relevant to their futures.

John Sloboda writing in 2001 also suggested that 'the musical enthusiasm and aspirations of many young people are not addressed by the current curriculum'. It could be argued that not much has changed in 20 years, even with an updated

National Curriculum and the more recent Model Music Curriculum. Stuart Button's research in 2006 showed that 43% of pupils 'found music at school uninteresting'. Perhaps this disconnect between what is taught in the school curriculum and what enthuses and inspires young people accounts for the numerous, successful performing arts weekend schools that exist up and down the country? This was a point picked up in the recent Government response to their call for evidence re the National Plan for Music Education.

Arts provision outside of schools appears to be flourishing – just take a look at Stagecoach. The termly fees appear quite expensive in one go (Cheltenham is £336 for £13 weeks) and there are additional costs for uniform. However, as an hourly rate it's around £8.61 so much, much less than a private instrumental lesson. Small groups and termly showcases are popular with parents, as are specialist teachers. I think perhaps parents understand 'singing, dancing and drama' in this context more than they do in curriculum lessons.

So how do we support the uptake of creative subjects alongside the Ebacc? We advocate for our subjects, not just to pupils but to parents, other teachers, Headteachers, CEOs of academy chains and Governors. We use all the research available to us to show school leaders the importance of investing time, personnel and funding into our subjects and demonstrate the impact that will have on our pupils. We build partnerships with our teaching colleagues in other departments – the Arts should not be pitted against each other and subject hierarchies need to be challenged. We engage with parents on how the Arts can enhance their children's lives within and beyond formal education, building self-esteem, confidence and empathy as well as showing clear career pathways. We ensure we are the best role models for the Arts that we can be, supporting our pupils' interests, widening their opportunities, celebrating their successes and helping them to progress to the next stage of their journey. Join and use your subject associations like the ISM – they will all have resources, CPD opportunities and campaigns to support you.

In March 2020, schools across the UK and around the world closed to slow the spread of COVID-19. Many schools moved to remote learning and started using online resources where possible. However, many pupils lacked access to

technology. ISM research found that music education, in some cases, only became available through instrumental lessons for those families who could afford them or had the technology in place for remote learning.

Published in December 2020, the ISM report *The Heart of the school is missing: Music education in the COVID-19 crisis* collated over 1300 responses across the UK music teaching profession working in schools. Our survey findings revealed the detrimental impact that COVID-19 has had on music education. All aspects of music education were being impacted – curriculum entitlement, singing in schools, practical music making, extra-curricular activities, instrumental learning and examinations. Our survey findings also suggested that music teachers' health and well-being was being negatively affected by the changes they were experiencing in the delivery of classroom and extra-curricular music and the amount of support they had received from their schools.

Respondents reported that:

- Music provision was being reduced as a direct result of COVID-19 in 68% of primary schools and 39% of secondary schools
- Extra-curricular activities were no longer taking place in 72% of primary schools and 66% of secondary schools
- Almost 10% of primary and secondary schools were not teaching class music at all
- 16% of secondary music teachers had no access at all to specialist music classrooms
- 43% of music teachers had been required to move between non-specialist classrooms to teach some or all of their music lessons last academic year

Following on from our research, Mark Philips, Senior HMI and National Lead for Music at Ofsted, recently gave a speech at the Music and Drama Education Expo where he stressed the importance of not de-professionalising and devaluing the role of the teacher by taking a scheme of work and saying 'anyone can teach this'. He went on to say that it's simply not true – 'it takes a musical music teacher to teach it'.

‘...without the expert knowledge, the expert behaviour of the music teacher, no resource is of any worth whatsoever, it takes a music teacher. A printed or published scheme of work cannot listen to what the pupils are doing. A published scheme of work does not respond to the unexpected response from the pupil, it can’t celebrate what the pupil does well, that’s the job of the music teacher.’

Beyond the intrinsic value of studying music for its own sake, there is a plethora of evidence that studying music builds cultural knowledge, creative skills and improves children’s health, wellbeing and wider educational attainment. And just this week Classic FM published an article explaining how teachers have seen a ‘noticeable decrease in children’s fine motor skills’ and how practical music lessons could play a vital role in facilitating the catch-up of young people’s handwriting and muscle memory.

Music must be central to the recovery curriculum, playing a vital role in schools helping their students to explore and express the varied emotions and challenges that they will have experienced during the pandemic, building stronger relationships and communities within schools and with families.

But there may be hope.....

The recent cabinet reshuffle and the appointment of a new Secretary of State and Minister of Education provides the perfect opportunity to look afresh at the education system as a whole as well as the EBacc and Progress 8 specifically. In his speech to the Conservative Conference on 4th October 2021, Nadhim Zahawi made a promise that he would be led by evidence in his decision making. And there is a wealth of evidence that the current education system and the current exam system is not working and is not fit for purpose. Select committees, think tanks, education foundations, teaching unions and industry bodies all agree that the EBacc is a flawed policy.

We need a more diverse approach than the ideological knowledge-rich curriculum of Nick Gibb, influenced by the work of ED Hirsh. We need to reform accountability measures such as Progress 8 so that Arts education can be supported not restricted

and to allow for parity of subject status. Reducing the number of subjects included in such measures to Maths, English and Science – at Progress 5 – would help maintain the broad and balanced curriculum until the end of Key Stage 4, and allow pupils more flexibility in their subject choices to better reflect their interests, talents and future plans.

Some have gone further and called for a complete re-think of GCSEs, including Robert Halfon MP, Chair of the Education Select Committee, a collective of independent schools, head teachers and other key figures such as Lord Kenneth Baker called Rethinking Assessment and the One Nation Caucus of Conservative MPs which has called for a replacement of GCSEs with a Baccalaureate-type qualification at age 18 which could be either academic, technical or an apprenticeship. It is clear that the appetite for change is growing and now is a golden opportunity for the DfE to reverse the damaging policies of the last decade.

Whilst we are facing an unprecedented crisis in music education, COVID-19 also provides us with a pivotal moment for reflection and an opportunity to reset education policy. We have a potential opening in which to build a curriculum which puts young people's needs first, championing creative learning in addition to Science, Technology, English and Maths (STEM) and addressing the needs of young people in the post-COVID-19 world. It also offers the opportunity to revisit the nature and purpose of assessments to ensure young people are fully equipped for the future.

The arts are a powerful contributor to wellbeing. Exam pressures, a volatile external environment and technological and social change, in particular social media, are all linked to young people's wellbeing. You give young people the opportunity to find their creative voices and prepare them for the future. All we have to do now is to get the Government onside and reform the blockages in our current education system to make sure that the arts are central in our schools again.

As Tagore said:

“Don't limit a child to your own learning, for he was born in another time.”

ⁱhttps://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/936097/Curriculum_research_How_to_assess_intent_and_implementation_of_curriculum_191218.pdf

ⁱⁱhttps://www.ism.org/images/files/ISM_UK-Music-Teachers-survey-report_Dec-2020_A4_ONLINE-2.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱhttps://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1006059/Report_on_the_call_for_evidence_on_music_education.pdf

^{iv}<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/children-and-young-people/music-education-hubs-survey>

^v<https://www.conservatives.com/our-plan>

^{vi}<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/budget-2020-documents/budget-2020>

^{vii}<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-09-06/43435/>