

MSP Briefing: COVID-19 Update–Music in Schools

Purpose of this briefing

This briefing aims to update MSPs on the provision of Music in schools, particularly the provision of instrumental music tuition, in the context of **COVID-19** from the perspective of the EIS, Scotland’s largest teaching union. It considers the importance of equitable access to music education as part of the **Recovery Curriculum** and the damaging impact of the pandemic on music tuition for children and young people, Instrumental Music Teachers (‘IMTs’) and society as a whole.

Why raise this now?

Since the full-time return of schools in August 2020, teachers across Scotland have been grappling with the challenges of teaching in the context of COVID-19. **For IMTs, these challenges have been stark with potentially long-lasting consequences.**

A [recent survey](#) of IMT members highlighted:

- the inconsistent approaches in the delivery of Instrumental Music Tuition across Scotland, with IMTs in some areas unable to return safely to school and having to adapt and develop new approaches for practical online teaching – often with insufficient resources and support;
- particular concerns about the future delivery of tuition in voice, wind and brass, as IMTs in these areas anxiously wait to hear whether they can safely return to face-to-face teaching in schools;
- concern over COVID-19 risk assessments not taking account of the specific nature of instrumental music tuition, e.g. the need for ample space and well-ventilated rooms;
- increased workload demands, with expectations in some areas that IMTs will deliver extra online teaching, outwith hours;
- the damaging impact of the pandemic on young people’s access to music tuition, particularly those currently studying for SQA qualifications and those from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- legitimate fears that any reduction in provision could lead to fewer students learning music, with serious implications for the future of instrumental music services and for IMT jobs.
- the considerable strain on IMTs as they struggle to balance the pressure of working longer, unsociable hours to save the service and their jobs, whilst seeking to protect their own – and their pupils’ – health and wellbeing.

As local authorities begin to review budgets this year, we would urge you to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on instrumental music tuition with local authorities and continue to defend its provision for the benefit of children and young people and for society as a whole.

New evidence about the impact of charging: proving 'who pays, plays'

New evidence¹ has emerged which demonstrates that charging has a direct impact on pupil participation and on equity of provision.

What we know:

- **27** local authorities have now introduced some form of charging regime, through the introduction of tuition fees, instrument hire charges or a combination of both, leaving only **5** Councils across Scotland, where there are no costs associated with access to instrumental music tuition.
- Even more worrying is the dramatic increase in the level of charging which we have seen in recent years. In some areas of Scotland, annual charges are now **in excess of £300** per pupil, with charges reaching **£524 per annum** in one authority.

The result:

- **Non-charging** local authorities have seen an **increase** in pupil numbers of **31.4%** since 2012/13
- **Charging** authorities have had an overall **decline of 12.7%** in pupil numbers over the same period

These statistics clearly demonstrate that **Scotland is rapidly moving towards a scenario where only children from well-off families can learn to play an instrument.** This is unjust and unacceptable. **We would urge you to support our campaign to reverse the trend of charging to allow free access to music education for all, particularly those for whom the poverty-related attainment gap has widened as a result of COVID-19.**

Wellbeing and Equity in the context of COVID-19

The impact of charging must also be considered in conjunction with the increased financial pressures which many families are facing as a result of the pandemic.

School closure and lockdown have wreaked the most damage upon children and families who are most disadvantaged by societal inequality. A recent report from the Music Education Partnership Group ('MEPG')² has looked specifically at the outcomes from teaching music online over the lockdown period.

The results confirm that the children least likely to participate in online music lessons were those who were considered most vulnerable – young people who are care experienced, who have experienced trauma and who have sensory impairments. Similarly, the progress of those young people living in areas of socio-economic disadvantage, who had no access to equipment or poor internet access, was significantly hampered.

The EIS is clear that **intervention is needed now** to help those children and young people

- to recover lost ground;
- to address the injustice caused by the charging system; and
- in meeting the needs of learners, to ensure equity of access for all.

¹ Improvement Service: [Instrumental Music Services: Results from the IMS Survey 2020 \(improvementservice.org.uk\)](https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/instrumental-music-services-results-from-the-ims-survey-2020)

² MEPG, 'We make music online': <https://wemakemusiconline.files.wordpress.com/2020/09/wmmo-full-report-2020.pdf>

Updated Information on IMTs' Contribution to Education

IMTs deliver a vast amount of high-quality music education in challenging circumstances.

- In 2019/20, **56,198** pupils participated in instrumental music lessons with their local authority service at some point over the course of the year³
- Over the course of 2019/20 at least **16,460** pupils participated in additional activities run by Instrumental Music Services, such as orchestras, bands, camps and ensembles
- This is against a backdrop of a further decrease in instructor numbers. With a loss of 40 FTE posts over two years, IMT numbers are at the lowest recorded since 2013.⁴

Evidence also suggests that demand for instrumental music lessons outweighs the resources currently allocated to it by local authorities. A report from the Improvement Service highlights that access to instrumental music is becoming a lottery, with only 6 local authorities providing provision for all interested pupils in 2019/20.⁵

IMTs also play a significant role in delivering National Qualifications in Music. For some courses e.g. Higher Music, performance constitutes 60% of the assessment⁶. Pupils perform their instrumental pieces best with input from highly skilled, professional IMTs.

Without adequate investment in IMTs, the achievement of music qualifications will continue to decline, an alarming trend which is becoming evident. SQA data⁷ shows that the number of entrants for music qualifications at N4, N5 and Higher levels has declined significantly in 2019, compared with 2016 figures:

Subject	2016 entrants	2019 entrants	Change
N4 Music	1,383	1,238	down by 145
N5 Music	7,542	7,203	down by 339
Higher Music	5,181	5,068	down by 113

Given the current limitations on access to practical tuition, particularly in voice, wind and brass, IMTs are concerned about the impact on young people studying for SQA qualifications this year and consequently, on the number of entrants in future years.

The value of music education in the Recovery Curriculum

There is a vast amount of evidence about the value of studying and playing music⁸. IMT members of the EIS have observed and actively contribute to, the very wide range of benefits to pupils gained from learning a musical instrument, including increased confidence, improved organisational skills, enhanced literacy and numeracy, the development of collaboration skills and increased focus and concentration.

³ Improvement Service: [Instrumental Music Services: Results from the IMS Survey 2020 \(improvementservice.org.uk\)](https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/instrumental-music-services-results-from-the-ims-survey-2020)

⁴ Improvement Service: [Instrumental Music Services: Results from the IMS Survey 2020 \(improvementservice.org.uk\)](https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/instrumental-music-services-results-from-the-ims-survey-2020)

⁵ Improvement Service: [Instrumental Music Services: Results from the IMS Survey 2020 \(improvementservice.org.uk\)](https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/instrumental-music-services-results-from-the-ims-survey-2020)

⁶ SQA Higher Course Specification: [modification-summary-music-music-portfolio.pdf \(sqa.org.uk\)](https://www.sqa.org.uk/modification-summary-music-music-portfolio.pdf)

⁷ SQA Statistics 2019: <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/91419.html>

⁸ Music Education in the 21st Century in the UK: Achievements, analysis and aspirations, Eds. Hallam and Creech, 2010; the impact of instrumental music learning on attainment at age 16: a pilot study. Hallam and Rogers, B. J. Music Ed. 2016 33:3, 247–261, Cambridge University Press 2016

At this time, more than ever, music plays an important role in promoting the health and wellbeing of children and young people. Feedback from IMT members in our recent survey highlighted its importance to the Recovery Curriculum, with one member commenting:

'I think right now music and particularly the feeling of being together and being creative together would bring much joy to the children. I've had amazing smiley faces this week at my lessons. Let's get back to bringing that joy and learning to our young people.'

We believe that this joy to which the member refers, together with the wide range of benefits of learning and playing music, have still not been fully appreciated by educational policy makers in Scotland. Music education has been consistently undervalued for many years. **This must change if we hope to support children and young people as they re-engage with school life and use music as a medium to bridge the gaps of social and emotional isolation caused by the pandemic.**

Consequences of continued erosion of IM Services

Unless immediate action is taken to support instrumental music services, the consequences will be dire, including:

- significant **job losses** among skilled professional teachers at a time when teacher numbers are a serious concern
- **undermining of the delivery of the Recovery Curriculum**
- a **devastating impact** on instrumental music tuition in schools, damaging pupils' educational experience and stopping untapped talent from being identified and developed
- an **erosion of Scotland's schools' contribution to the cultural life** of the country.

At this time, we need to nurture talent, not create barriers to its discovery.

What can MSPs do?

We urge you to:

- add your support to the EIS campaign to defend instrumental music tuition, as an important component of the Recovery Curriculum
- explore with schools in your constituency the impact of the pandemic on music tuition, the learner experience and the health and wellbeing of IMTs, working in difficult circumstances at this time
- discuss with local authorities the results of your findings and encourage them to address the concerns highlighted by IMTs in our survey and in this report
- encourage local authorities to defend the service, reject further cuts and find ways of offering instrumental music lessons without charge
- raise the issues highlighted in this briefing with the Scottish Government and ask it to defend music provision, with dedicated funding, to ensure that every child can receive instrumental music lessons and benefit from the positive contribution which music makes to health and wellbeing at this challenging time.

Questions?

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