



**P-04-637 To Protect the Future of Youth Music in Wales. Correspondence –
Welsh Joint Education Committee to the Chair 8.08.2016**

Mr Mike Hedges AM
Chair, Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff CF99 1NA

8 August 2016

Dear Mike Hedges,

Petition P-04-0637 – To Protect the Future of Youth Music in Wales

Thank you for your correspondence in relation to this matter. I apologise for the inordinate delay in replying.

You ask specifically about our "plans relating to resources for the National Youth Orchestra". During the period since June 2015 when you have been considering this petition, a Welsh Government task group (chaired by the Arts Council of Wales) has reported on the prospects for securing the future of youth arts provision at a national level: its report is available here:

<http://gov.wales/topics/cultureandsport/arts/national-youth-arts-ensembles-of-wales/?lang=en>

The recommendations of this report are being taken forward by an Interim Board which is working to set up a National Youth Arts Wales (NYAW) organisation as a company limited by guarantee (which will then apply for charity status). In preparation for this, WJEC (in association with Ty Cerdd, its partner organisation within the current NYAW arrangements) has taken the following steps in order to improve the financial situation for the new organisation:

- standardised the fees charged on members of the youth ensembles at £42 per 24-hour residential period (hence participants in the National Youth Orchestra have each been charged approx. £500 for this year's summer activity)
- established arrangements for administering bursaries from the very generous legacy donation by Mr Haydn Webber of Whitchurch, Cardiff, allowing us to support those young people who have genuine difficulty meeting the increased charges
- reduced the size of the small central team of youth arts staff.

During the period in which the task group was undertaking its work, the local authorities collectively agreed to one further year of funding for the three national youth ensembles that have the longest residential tuition periods (orchestra, theatre and dance). This is at the same level as for 2015–16, being a 30% reduction on their contribution in 2014–15, which followed three consecutive reductions of 5% from the 2011–12 figure of £450k.

Whilst recognising that it is the severe external financial pressures imposed on them that has caused the local authorities' contribution to reduce from £450k to £270k, the potential removal of this element of funding support in its entirety for the 2017–18 financial year presents a significant threat to the future activity of the youth ensembles. As a consequence, it is unclear at present whether the National Youth Orchestra will have a residential tuition period and short concert tour during the summer of 2017 or whether it will be restricted to a single collaborative concert with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales (which features within our programme in alternate years).

In setting up the new National Youth Arts Wales organisation, we are mindful of the emphasis that needs to be placed on fundraising. However, we recognise that this is a considerable challenge for arts organisations in Wales and also that we need to invest in fund-raising capacity. It is indicated in the task group report that (if local authority funding is removed completely) the fundraising target for the new organisation is in the region of £350k and

advice received suggests that this level of fundraising may well require effort that could cost about £100k to source.

With a consequent annual fundraising target of the order of £450k it has to be recognised that, if this level is achievable at all, the new organisation is likely to take several years to reach it. For this reason, we shall continue to remind local authorities of the immense value of their contribution (even at £270k per annum or slightly less) and we also look forward to understanding the Welsh Government's position in relation to two other recommendations within the task group's report:

- (i) the possibility of direct funding from the Welsh Government education and/or arts budgets and/or from other Welsh Government budgets
- (ii) the potential for National Youth Arts Wales to become a key beneficiary of the National Endowment for Youth Music (NEYM), should this be established.

The connection between all of this and the main focus of the petition that you are considering (to protect music tuition in schools) was eloquently made by conductor Carlo Rizzi at the end of the Youth Orchestra's concert at St David's Hall last Friday evening. He suggested that it was "miraculous" that a nation of three million people could produce a youth orchestra of sufficient quality to make such a success of performing the challenging works by Bartok and Strauss that formed the main part of the programme, and that this was evidence of the quality of the underpinning music tuition.

It is clear, therefore, that your petitioners are focussing on an area where there is much at stake in terms of future provision. The national youth ensembles (of which the Youth Orchestra is the oldest, emerging from an initiative in 1946 by the Monmouthshire Education Authority and managed by WJEC for the 65th summer this year) are seen as operating on a pyramid basis, relying very much on the base layers of provision at local and regional level. Whilst we are attempting to address the challenges of securing a

sustainable future for the Youth Orchestra, we are aware that its quality is strongly associated with the availability of local music tuition.

Yours sincerely,

Gareth Pierce
Chief Executive