**Choices**

The recent news (January 2015) has focussed media attention on the need for adequate funding for national security and for the NHS. So where does that leave music education?

I was reminded that we have been facing funding challenges for at least 30 years and of my time in Local Government where I found myself arguing for funding for the music service alongside proposed cuts to old folks’ homes, fire stations and libraries from the same overall budget. Insufficient funding and challenges about the choices we make remain with us.

Professor Sue Hallam MBE has just updated her Power of Music paper and there is no doubt about the evidence that quality music education can and does change lives. Politicians ‘get it’ and music education has support across both Houses of Parliament and all parties. I am convinced that music education in England will still get funding over the course of the next parliament. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all face their own particular challenges and we are working on those too. Whatever successes we achieve in respect of funding across the four nations, we can be sure it won’t be enough to provide everything for everyone. So choices will have to be made as we continue the journey towards providing high quality music education for every young person.

John Finney’s recent blog <https://jfin107.wordpress.com/2015/01/09/what-is-music-education-for-in-the-age-of-measurement/> states *“the music teacher is not so much one who is accountable but one who is ethically responsible for what they choose to teach and the questions that this gives rise to”* and challenges us to address: *“what is music education for?”*

The Music Education Council is doing exactly that as it seeks to find consensus across the whole of the UK for Music Education for All in the 21st century. Only if we know what we are aspiring to, can we decide the next steps to take us in the right direction from where we are now towards that goal. Those steps need to take account of national and local contexts and priorities; the choices of individual teachers; and have the best interests of the young person at the centre of decision-making.

So as we start the new year, preparing for a new UK Government and gathering our arguments for funding for 2016 and beyond I suggest we need to do the following:

* Be clear about what we are trying to achieve, why, for whom and by when; and be prepared to be held to account for the decisions we take;
* Aspire to providing high quality music education for everyone and try to exceed expectations, monitoring what we do so that we know how effective we are being; and so that we can learn what we need to do next;
* Ensure that all funding is used effectively and efficiently and be able to demonstrate this; ensuring that public funding is used for the purposes for which it is provided.

If we each do this, then working together, the situation will be significantly better by 2020 and the case for further funding in the next UK parliament and beyond will be even stronger. Then maybe we will finally achieve great music education for all. It will all depend on the choices we make.

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