**Assessing and Acknowledging Attainment and Achievement**

My Oxford dictionary defines attainment as 1 ‘something attained or achieved; an accomplishment’; 2 ‘the act or instance of attaining’. Achievement is defined as: 1 ‘something achieved’; 2a ‘the act of achieving’; b ‘an instance of this’. However, this blog is not about definitions, important though they are!

This seems an appropriate time for the music education sector to reconsider what it is we are trying to do for young people. What they experience and how we help them to achieve. We now have the National Curriculum published. Later this term we expect there will be an Ofsted report to respond to. But for the moment we are looking at a new GCSE qualification for music. How do we recognise young people’s attainment? How do we celebrate in a meaningful way what they have achieved? How do we help them to evaluate realistically where they are in the wider scheme of things, enabling them to take more informed decisions about the part the may wish music to play in their lives?

Can one examination meet all of the requirements? Should assessment of prior learning be taken into account when considering the requirements of a syllabus? Is an examination meant to be general or specific and should a student be able to focus on a particular area of interest, for example, composing or performing?

What would ***your*** ideal answer be to these questions?

Members of the Music Education Council have been considering these very questions and related issues. Youth Music had a fascinating breakfast seminar last term and the ISM recently began an important piece of work around a new specification for music GCSE, which the ISM then handed to MEC to widen consultation across the music education sector. A representative MEC editorial board received comments and circulated a further draft. Comments were again received and another draft produced.

If you have missed out on this process, it is still not too late to engage. On **October 23rd** MEC will be hosting a seminar to share this draft and look at some of the wider issues raised specifically relating to GCSE. DfE officials are very interested in this work and have asked to be kept closely informed. We are also working with ACE and CLA as they undertake their work on behalf of the whole of the arts sector - more news on their progress too at the seminar.

Arts Award; BTEC; GCSE and Graded examinations for instruments and voice all offer distinctly different recognition of young people’s achievements. Clearly, working within the current context influences what may be possible in practice. But only if we can have an honest debate as a music education sector and reach some clear conclusions can we hope that those who have to implement policies can make them as good and relevant to young people as possible. I hope as many of you as possible are able to attend and that you will share this debate more widely with your colleagues.