

Response to the ‘Consultation on implementing the English Baccalaureate’

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“As the creative arts are one of the biggest industries in the UK and a big income generator why would you cut it off at its source?”

A report produced by Wired4Music member, Siân Dicker-Thorne



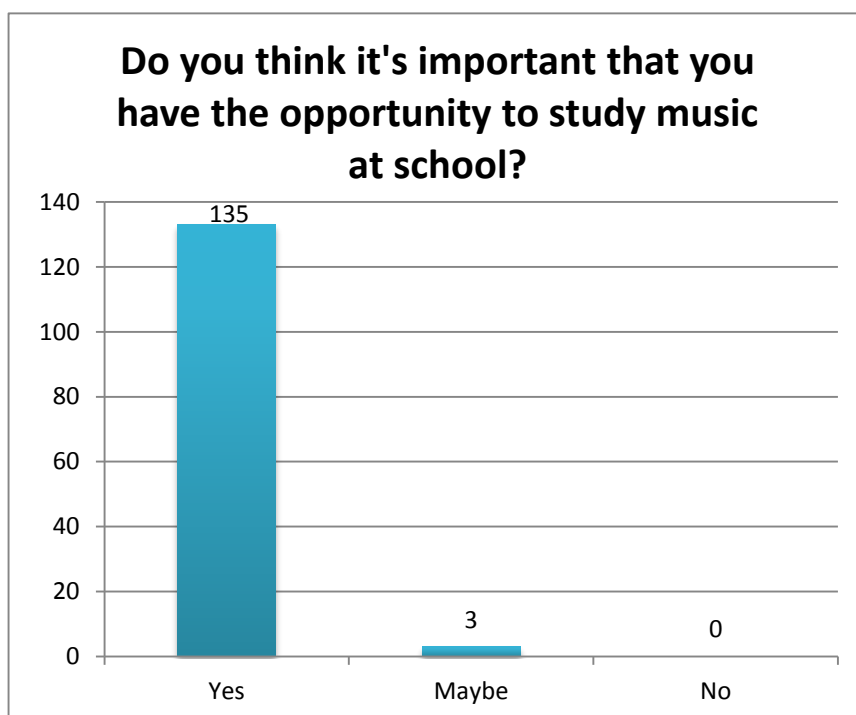
WIRED4MUSIC

The young Londoner’s music council, hosted by Sound Connections

Wired4Music – what do we think about the EBacc proposal?

In light of the Government’s open consultation launched in November 2015, on implementing the English Baccalaureate, Wired4Music felt it was imperative to hear from as many people aged **25 and under** about whether they think that studying music at school is important and why, and to ensure that their voices were heard. In a decision which could potentially leave little room for music and the arts within the national curriculum, it is crucial that the Government hears from those who this change will affect directly during their time at school. Likewise, it is important to hear the views of those who have experienced music as a part of their learning without the EBacc, who are able to shed light on if/how implementing the EBacc would have affected their musical experience at school and their musical experiences since leaving. We cast the net far and wide, sharing a short survey which gathered 138 responses from those who felt that their opinions needed to be heard and considered in the making of this decision.

Overwhelmingly, nearly 98% of respondents to our survey answered ‘yes’ in response to whether or not they thought that having the opportunity to study music at school was important. None of the young people who responded to this survey answered ‘no’ to this question.



If yes, why do you think it's important that you have the opportunity to study music at school?

We asked those who answered ‘yes’ to explain why they think it's important that young people have the opportunity to study music at school. 110 of the 138 survey respondents gave their opinions and several strong themes came out of this:

Music offers an opportunity to express oneself and explore creativity

Unsurprisingly, over a third (37%) of the young people who responded to this question said that they felt music was an important outlet for creativity and self-expression – **this is particularly worth highlighting in light of the DfE’s new measures to help schools build ‘character’ in pupils**. This point was considered important, particularly when making comparisons between music and the subjects offered by the EBacc. One response read:

“For those that find music to be an art which they can express themselves in I think it is very important that they are given the time to explore it during school in the same way that someone with a passion for literature is allowed to develop their interests at school.”

Many of the young people who responded suggested that learning to express themselves through music allowed them to grow in confidence. Music is a universal language and the creative skills they have gained at school have provided them with a communicative tool for later in life:

“It [music] is a way to express yourself as well as give confidence about the way you present yourself to people.”

“music is a way of expressing yourself that the majority of school age people identify most with. It is a very good skill to have and can provide great social skills in school and later in life.”

*“It [music] develops our creativity which is identified often as the key thing that young people need in life to succeed... You need to have the **resilience**, confidence and creativity to make your own way and music and the arts have a massive impact on that.”*

Music as an escape from “traditionally academic, more stressful” subjects

One response suggested the value of music as a relief from other subjects; *“To encourage creativity, and to have a break from highly academic subjects that can be stressful”*. Many agreed and also referred to music as an opportunity for those who struggle with more traditionally academic subjects to excel:

“Not every child is amazing at Maths, English, Science, but they may be at creative subjects and it’s only fair to give everyone the best possible chance of success.”

Conversely, many of the young people who responded to this survey felt strongly that whilst music is an opportunity to express and communicate creatively, its merit as an academic subject should not be undermined:

“Music is a language, a science... It’s also history, often important to many religions and allows one to transcend simply being able to add and subtract and evaluate Shakespeare. Music inspires generations of better people.”

When asked why they thought it is important to have the opportunity to study music at school, one response simply stated *“The same reason it’s important to study Maths, History, Science and Art.”* Regardless of whether for academic merit or the opportunity for students to excel in a creative subject, it is clear that there is a strong desire from these responses for music to be considered as equal to ‘traditional’ subjects:

“Because [the] curriculum should reflect and promote the diversity of intelligence in its pupils.”

An opportunity to explore new interests and create friendships

The idea of music as a community is a strong theme within many of the opinions offered to us by the young people who have responded to this question. Music in schools offers pupils the chance to work as a group and explore areas of music which they might not have previously experienced. Doing this as a group, and exploring creativity together, seems to be an opportunity highly valued:

“Group bonding rhythm exercises were great [at school] and a variety of genres (such as reggae, minimalism and classical music) just opens your eyes to the greatness and vastness of music.”

“It’s like learning to ride a bike; once you know it you’ll never forget it. It also builds up different kinds of friendships with people you have something in common with – and you often keep these friends for life!”

“[Music is important] for an increased appreciation of different styles of music, the opportunity to learn an instrument and work in a group. Studying music inspires creativity and engages lots of different parts of the brain.”

A place to learn transferrable social and academic skills

Similar to making friendships and working as a team, many of the responses also highlighted the importance of acquiring the skills to create these bonds, as well as academic skills which can benefit other subjects in the school curriculum. These young people felt that studying music gave them the opportunity to learn and use these skills at during their time at school:

“Music develops so many other skills that help the rest of a young person’s education and life chances – confidence, team work, time management...”

“I think that music has many benefits, including relaxation, motor skills, and memorisation techniques. It helps teach discipline and helps people stay engaged.”

“[Music is important] In order to learn an alternative skill, along with the transferrable skills that come with learning an instrument.”

“Because it [music] encourages empathy, team work and can help broaden what would otherwise be quite a narrow route of study.”

In fact, when asked why the opportunity to study music at school is important, 34% of the young people who gave their opinion referred to music as an opportunity to gain transferrable skills, be that socially, academically within other subjects at school, or life skills for the future. One young person who has gone onto start a career in music wrote about their experience since leaving school:

“Being a musician has taught me so many skills which I’m able to apply to my everyday life – creativity, sensitivity, consideration of others, time-keeping, organisation, administration skills (as a freelance musician you have to do your own admin!), empathy, and most importantly, it teaches young people to communicate and work together. These are skills in which I would now be lacking if I hadn’t studied music at school.”

Music as a benefit to mental health

From the 110 written responses we gathered to this question of the survey, 8 young people referred to music as a benefit to their mental health, explaining how studying the subject at school has helped them to express their feelings in a healthy and positive environment:

“...Music education also provided a safe-haven for myself and peers in times of need, when my mental health was suffering the artistic license music education gave me enabled me to come out of mental health issues a stronger, more resilient young person. Using music as a coping mechanism was safe and productive.”

“It [music in school] is access to an opportunity that my family can’t afford to pay for and it helps with my mental health.”

If studying music at school has had a positive effect on the mental health of 7.4% of young people who responded to this survey, then surely this number could grow by encouraging more young people to take an arts subject at GCSE level? In a country where 20% of adolescents may experience a mental health problem in any given year¹, school is often a safe haven for those who are dealing with emotional difficulties. Encouragement from schools for these young people to have the opportunity to express themselves through music would undoubtedly have an invaluable positive impact on the mental health of these students.

A place for young people to engage with music for free

With the recent closure of some music services and with others under threat, music lessons within school have become increasingly valuable and irreplaceable to not only those students looking to pursue music in Key Stage 4, but also those students in years 7-9 who may not be experiencing musical learning outside of school. Private music tuition is expensive and so for families who are unable to afford this cost, experiencing music at school is a gateway to music at higher education level and even as a career option.

“For some it will be the only introduction they ever get to music. Music should be accessible for all and the best way to do that is through schools.”

“If it [music] is in school everyone has the opportunity to learn, not just the people who have a higher income.”

“Families with low income can have the opportunity for their children to learn music if they can’t afford private tuition.”

¹ WHO (2003). Caring for children and adolescents with mental disorders: Setting WHO directions. [online] Geneva: World Health Organization. Available at: http://www.who.int/mental_health/media/en/785.pdf [Accessed 25 Jan. 2016].

If maybe, why do you/don't you think it's important that you have the opportunity to study music at school?

We asked those who answered 'maybe' to explain why they gave this answer. This question gathered 2 responses:

"Depends on the type of music."

"Sometimes I think it would be better to get training from music experts outside of school, but access to this would have to be fair."

These responses both allude to a concern about inclusivity and variety of music in schools, ensuring that a range of interests and needs are met. This is an issue further reflected upon in the final responses to the survey by others. However, the fact that not one survey participant selected 'no' in answer to this question is a strong statement and a clear indicator that music is of great importance to those currently studying at school and has had a large impact on those young people who have completed their studies. The vast breadth and diversity of responses to why they felt music in school was important shows not only the many different ways in which music is affecting the lives of these young people and their educations/careers, but also that this is something that they feel strongly about and a decision in which they feel their voices need to be heard.

Is there anything else you'd like to share with Government decision-makers about the music opportunities you have at school?

Finally, we asked if there was anything else that these young people would like to share their thoughts about regarding the potential implementation of the EBacc. 79 of the 138 survey respondents answered this question, and responses can generally be categorised into 3 subheadings:

Further expansion on why music in school is important

Many respondents felt that they wanted to use this opportunity to give more information and explanation as to why they felt so strongly that music in school is important to them, both personally and also taking their peers into consideration. Further solidifying views already given on the benefits music can offer towards coping with mental health issues, a common theme in the responses to this final part of the survey hinted towards music as 'therapy'. One young person writes:

"For me and many others, music is a comforter, an outlet and a joy. Just as some are committed to being good at Maths, English or Science, others are committed to Music. I see people every day rebel at school or argue with teachers and this is because they feel that school doesn't cater for them as they are not academic... Music is a valid, wonderful and very real thing that affects nearly everyone in a positive way. When I make music, I am happy."

"Without music I would probably not still be allowed at school, the music lessons give me something positive to look forward to each week."

Responses also referred to music in school as an opportunity to explore and consider different options for future career paths:

“Music is a big part of some children’s lives and giving us more opportunity in school to take part in it is great in helping us decide our career paths.”

“Without the subsidised/free instrumental lessons I received at school, I would stand out less in the job market and most likely not be as socially adequate. Music and other arts opportunities can bring out talent and confidence in those who are otherwise liable to being wholly disengaged with school and perhaps even general society.”

Music’s role in our society was an idea also explored by other young respondents:

“Music GCSE and A level have suffered loads with small participation levels; yet it is the Music department that holds and helps with the Winter Concerts, School productions, Carol services, Remembrance services, Talent shows and Summer Concerts. I’d like to point out the disparity between Music consumption in British society and Music production; us young people just are not pushed to take music seriously and perhaps this is a disadvantage for British musicians”.

“Studying music at pre GCSE level was one of my favourite lessons, it required learning some basic technical theory but at the same time time an opportunity to have fun with creating pieces of composition alone or as a group. The implications for music within the wider world are huge, it’s an inherent part of not only British culture but the whole world”.

“As the creative arts are one of the biggest industries in the UK and a big income generator why would you cut it off at its source?”

Reflection on how music has helped these young people get to where they are now

Many of the young people who have completed their studies at school have used this opportunity to reflect upon how their musical experiences and the support from their music teachers have impacted their time since leaving school. One young person writes:

“I have had so many opportunities at school. I’ve made some great friends and performed in amazing concert venues all over the world. If it wasn’t for my music teachers at school, I wouldn’t be at music college now.”

“Thanks to my school, I was able to realise my dream of becoming a singer and songwriter. Through my school, I was able to gain confidence in performing by myself or with others and I was able to express myself through my lyrics writing comfortably and easily”.

Respondents also voiced their opinions on where they feel they would be without having studied music at school and their fears for those who might not be able to experience what they have:

“I have had so many opportunities to perform in different places and venues through music in school. Without it I would be robbed of great experiences.”

“It all started in school and now music is my profession. It wouldn’t be fair to hinder that opportunity for future generations. Also it sends a message that the arts are unimportant or trivial, which couldn’t be more wrong.”

“Music is something that I love with my whole heart and would urge anyone to take up. By not educating people in music, then the music world is folding. You wouldn’t have people to play at the BBC Proms, play in the Blues and Royals or in any band in the UK!”

What these young people hope to see for music in schools in the future

Some of the young people who answered this final part of the survey spoke about what they would like to see happen for music education within schools, speaking specifically about the music curriculum, and further musical opportunities that they would like to see in school and the importance of access to music for all.

“I'm really sad that music is sidelined so much. I'm currently doing Grade 6 Flute but won't be able to do GCSE music next year because it's not available for me.”

“More tech based production, pedagogy must evolve as society and the instruments within it change too.”

“Better teachers who know how to teach it properly and get down with the kids if needs be! Music was pretty dull at my school we never learnt anything but luckily I had a passion and now study it at university”

“We need a bigger variety of instruments and clubs. They do not get publicity at our school and they deserve it.”

School is a place where young people should be allowed the opportunity to express themselves, discover their interests and strengths and obtain skills which will carry them through the remainder of their lives. If young people are not actively encouraged to pursue subjects within the arts, there is a danger of talent slipping through the net and more importantly, a risk of young people not discovering an area of interest which could become a life-long passion. School is of course important for gaining qualifications in the 5 proposed 'pillars', but for the majority of the young people we have consulted with, school would have been a less enjoyable and well-rounded experience without music. The Government must speak to young people directly, as it would be a huge oversight to consider making the decision to implement the EBacc without properly consulting with those who it will directly affect.

With thanks to everyone who responded to the Wired4Music English Baccaulaureate consultation survey.

To get in touch with us, please contact us on info@wired4music.co.uk

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