

# **Symposium on Music in Higher Education in Ireland**

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Keynote Address

## **The Value and Range of Music and Creative Practice in UK HEIs**

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### **Introduction**

This paper revisits some of the central questions affecting our discipline in higher education at the moment. I raise what will be familiar questions to those working within music departments (and the other arts and humanities), and I explore those issues in relation to the UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) context, notably with reference to the advocacy activity which is currently being undertaken by the National Association of Music in Higher Education ([NAMHE](#)), for which I act as vice chair (since 2013) and committee member (since 2012). Along the way I draw on personal anecdote and reference to relevant recent literature. Links are embedded to press releases, news items and government policy throughout the paper.

Responding to the central themes of the day, I structure the discussion by outlining the UK context before exploring some of the challenges facing music in UK HEIs, then outlining some of the current possibilities and suggesting some future directions.

### **Key Questions**

What are the key issues affecting Music in HEIs, in the UK in particular? And, why is music, as a subject, singled out in this question? The expense of studio-based degrees, technological equipment (both hardware and software) and facilities are of note, as well as space hungry vocational courses and programmes which require a lot of personal student time per head to space available (for example, practice rooms, control rooms, studio space, performance space) make them less efficient, more expensive, and

consequently, more at risk than their subject counterparts. Though the cost implications of such degrees can make them at risk under recent policy changes, they have many benefits for educating and training the student body as they provide a breadth of practical, vocational skills that are tailored toward employment and industry. Why is music under threat in the UK? Alex Preston's recent article, '[The War Against the Humanities at Britain's Universities](#)' (29 March 2015) for *The Guardian* details some of the long running issues regarding marketisation of university courses, following the [Browne Review](#). Since the coalition government formed in 2010 cuts, led largely by Rt Hon Michael Gove (Secretary of State for Education, until 2014) and Rt Hon David Willetts (Minister of State for Universities and Science, until 2014), removed all direct funding from universities, the arts have had to fight against the science, technology and engineering subjects for any funding. With the rise of £9,000 fees in [2012/2013](#), students are seeking value for money from a 'business', with a focus on the end result and ultimately a change in their expectation, notably that paying for a degree will reap guaranteed rewards. Certainly some academics have reported students asking, 'why did I fail this module, when I paid for this course'. Personal engagement and financial cost are not by default directly related. Students are not paying for their degree; they pay for their educational experience.

This question regarding the place and place of arts and humanities subjects, and notably music, expands beyond HEIs. With the current political agenda driven at privileging maths, science and technology, the arts and humanities are being side lined at school level (due to the facilitating subjects agenda) with drastic consequences not only for HEI, but also for diverse cultural activity and the future creative economy.

How can we, as music scholars within HEIs, meet the present challenges of facing diminished funding and a hierarchy of subjects imposed by the facilitating subjects agenda? How can we, as a discipline, find new possibilities and fruitful directions for the future direction and protection of the subject?

## **UK Context**

The UK has a wealth and wide range of Music degree courses, which are run by Universities (by both Russell group and post 1992 institutions), Further Education Colleges (which are validated by Universities), and by many private providers, such as BIMM and ACM. Students can choose the traditional music B.Mus or B.A. which trains performance, composition, analysis and musicology (with a variety of focus on specific genres, styles, and methods), or a Music Technology course which incorporates production, recording, coding and sonic arts, or a Creative Music Technologies degree which integrates composition and performance through the creative use of technology, though does not train students specifically to be producers or technicians. There are courses in music business, music management, events management, arrangement, song-writing, composing for TV and Film,

and commercial music, to name a few. Degree titles are becoming more and more mediatized and more driven by a link to industry.

Degrees training employment skills are essential, but there is risk that focusing courses only on a specific job or industry will reduce the breadth, diversity and integration of transferable skills which will facilitate the necessary career portfolio open to most graduates. Courses with more traditional titles, such as Music, initially fared better in the introduction of £9,000 pound fees, but latterly, admissions across many UK HEIs is suffering.

Departmental closures have regrettably become common place over the last decade – we have seen the closure of music at [Exeter University](#) (2004), [Reading University](#) (2004-2005), [University of East Anglia](#) (2011), [Lancaster University](#) (2013-2015), Roehampton University (2010), with pathways closing at other universities, and other institutions currently battling to preserve their taught postgraduate programmes, while others are currently subjected to staff redundancies. Most recently has been the announcement of the closure of the Institute for Musical Research (IMR) in its current form, which has been successfully run by the University of London: it connected across all UK departments offering research training for postgraduates and research networks for all music staff. NAMHE wrote to the Dean of the [School of Advanced Study](#) in 2014. Since then, the brand of [IMR](#) will be transferred to Royal Holloway University.

There are two key issues: 1. with the removal of direct funding from the government, the cap on student numbers has been removed, enabling league table leaders to expand and accept as many students as they are able, both from the AAB attainment level and beyond. 2. With increasing costs, lower funding and in some cases more students targeted by a widening participation agenda, students are enthusiastic but more dependent on wider support in terms of writing skills, research skills, independent study skills and confidence building. There is a necessary priority laid on the student voice and their wider educational needs beyond the immediate subject. The academic role is not only one of lecturing, tutoring, supervising, researching, management and administration – the support of pastoral care and the training of literacy skills (in its broadest sense) are now central to the role, in a way of that was not the case 10-15 years ago.

As a personal anecdote, I have experienced change across three HEIs, witnessing fast expansion, a departmental closure and the introduction of increased fees. I was a part time lecturer at a large campus university during the expansion of music from c.30-60 students per cohort, with the introduction of a degree in Music Technology. Admissions were strong and admission targets expected A levels in music, usually with an ABB grade. I moved to a post '92 London University, which expected BBB or BBC at A level and potential students sat a theory admissions paper. Technology was integrated into the music degree. Admissions were strong but financial pressures to generate income from courses, short courses, to reach a wider market by online course and distance learning had disastrous ramifications for a course that offered performance (both solo and ensemble) in a variety of

manifestations. Perceived as expensive, small, with limited room for expansion, and limited research outputs when assessed on traditional written articles, chapters and books (as the majority of the department developed compositions and practice as research dissemination) the course was eventually seen out. Now I am based in a university with a strong and developing focus on practice as research, with undergraduate degrees in Music and Creative Music Technologies, five taught specifically named MA pathways, an international franchise programme and various other partnerships. Despite the diversity between these three institutions the core concerns, budgetary questions and policy impacts have been comparable. Ultimately, the student experience is all-important, though as everywhere in HEIs there has been an increased emphasis on income generation (through external grant application and corporate research consultancy).

Summarising the UK HEI context, in relation to music over the last decade, small courses have been, and some are still, at risk. The threat arises because these courses require similar space and equipment as their larger counterparts, which are able to bring in more income from students and staff research. Courses that can be taught to larger groups, enabling a critical mass and 'positive' staff-student ratio in financial terms, are often stronger.

As a discipline it is essential that we collectively ask: How can we avoid such threats, or at least protect ourselves from them? And, why is music under threat when there is student demand in the UK for the subject? A wider contextual survey is required. Voices from the arts and humanities need to be heard at policy level and within the higher echelons of the universities that house the subjects.

### **Challenges = Costs, Capacity and Competition**

The challenges for music departments in HEIs are varied. Government policies have changed the university landscape dramatically during the last government cycle (2010-2015): with a new fee regime resulting in 'high cost' courses, and the removal of all direct funding to universities, university managers have had no choice but to react as a 'business' to seek new income streams, to streamline costs, refine their offer to ensure maximum return, and to assess league table positions and align strategy to the improvement of those positions. The notion of a university as an educational institution to advance the study and knowledge of its students, versus education that is viewed as a commodity, is a tense debate that has daily ramifications for academics. The definition of a University, spanning the Latin definition as a body of people/scholars, extending from the Latin for totality, universe, positively connotes the inclusivity and diversity of subjects according to the needs of those choosing to study. Of course, it is a reassuring reminder that the medieval university, quadrivium, incorporated music as one of the four subjects. The name suggests four pathways that meet to advance the understanding and application of knowledge. The tenor is one of development, intellectual advancement and critical engagement for its own sake.

Music degrees in the current political and economic climate are deemed to be high cost: one to one performance tuition is expensive in comparison to a science lecture delivered to over 100 students at one time. The requirement for specialized spaces housing expensive studios and musical equipment are comparable to the sciences, though may be seen as a luxury cost in comparison to library requires of the average humanities student. Some courses have chosen to charge students an additional fee to cover their performance tuition; others have taken the financial hit from their capital funding, which leaves less money to cover other resources; others use income gained from external validations and franchise programmes to subsidise the financial implications of their performance programmes; while others chosen to cut performance tuition entirely, ultimately with disastrous ramifications to the longevity of the course. The majority of students are introduced to music through performance and practical engagement while at school or within extra curricular community projects. As such, maintaining performance within degree courses is vital: it is an activity which student expect. Although the degrees do not train only performance, its place within programmes at least as an option is wise, not least for those wishing to specialise in performance, but for those wishing to hear their compositions performed live, and for those wishing to learn how to record, produce and market live performances.

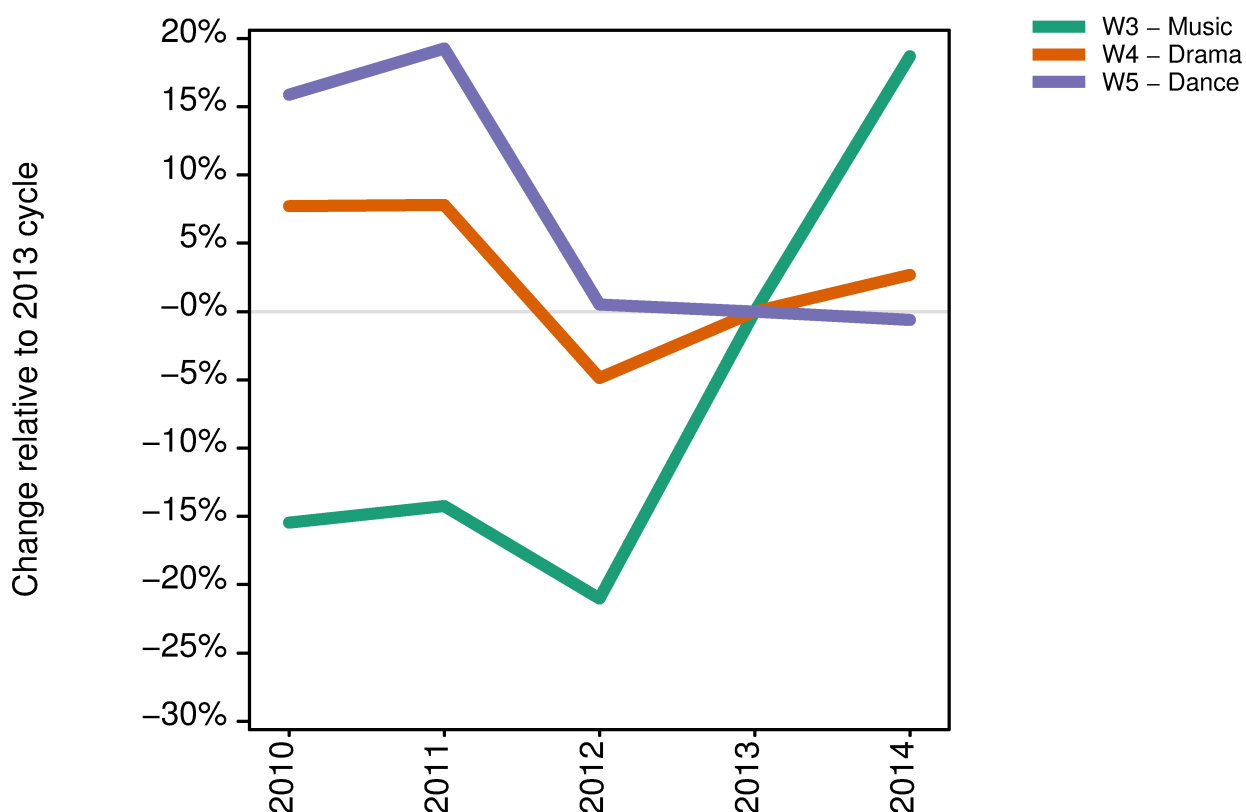
Music classes are by necessity smaller than their science and technology counterparts, and although critical mass is more difficult to achieve, namely the number of students to staff, the more personalised classroom education and feedback provide an experience predicated on the quality of the student experience. It is one of many strengths in the subject: in smaller groups students are able to learn from regular conversations with peers and colleagues. With smaller student numbers in a classroom students are more able to contribute their individual voices within debates and presentations. As an academic, we are more able to meet and respond to the needs of individuals. The capacity to expand and to generate more income is usually directly correlated to the specific space restriction and to the potential impact of repeat teaching sessions in order to house students in purpose built rooms.

Music is space hungry – as a subject, we need: practice rooms containing pianos, sound desks, microphone, amplifiers and mirrors; ensemble/band rooms; performance spaces; studios; live rooms; control rooms; drum rooms; and various specific spaces ranging from rooms to house a gamelan, mac labs and instrument store rooms. Many such spaces are not flexible or dual purposes: space audits inevitably produce a low yield result than a lecture theatre.

Beyond the cost of running the courses and the capacity for accommodating student, there are other competitive issues. Since 2013 private providers of music degrees joined the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service ([UCAS](#)), our admissions system for the UK (it should be noted that Conservatoires and specialized arts colleges use their own system). Due to the inclusion of these providers (considered as new providers within the

UCAS metrics) the application figures since 2013 show a significant spike. 13 new institutions were integrated into the central system in 2013 that reflect some of this spike, but significantly the UCAS figures show that numbers for a course in music are healthy (the figures include all music courses, regardless of course name). Admissions have however decreased: whether this is due to admissions attainment tariff, parent-student financial concerns, or something other is unknown. Further national research is required in this area.

**Total applicants to full-time drama, music and dance courses  
- % difference to 2013**



Helen Thorne, UCAS, at [Survival of the Fittest?](#)  
Promoting Dance, Drama and Music through UK Higher Education,  
Joint Conference with [NAMHE](#), [SCUDD](#) and [DanceHE](#),  
28 February 2015, Senate House, London

## Policy

Among the many government, there have been three specific policies put in place which affect music education: 1. In 2013 there was a [Cultural Engagement Programme](#) muted which decree the integration of culture in the curriculum proposing the known benefits for integrating diversity into the class room. 2. [The National Plan for Music](#) was published in 2011, charting the ways in which music would be developed and offered in schools and within the community, it asserted music's importance in 'underpinning excellence and professionalism' for all who study it. 3. The [GCSE and A Level Reform](#) (2015), initially led by Rt Hon Michael Gove and concluded by Rt Hon Nicky Morgan, has developed a policy for facilitating subjects. These subject include of: English literature, History, Modern Languages, Classical, Maths, Physics, Biology, Chemistry and Geography. As such, the privileges science and social science over the creative arts.

The agenda which is projected both in policy documents, via televised debates and via the emphasis on specific subjects is one that tells pupils that the arts are the 'soft' option. Facilitating subjects, in the 2014 '[School and College Performance Tables – Statement of Intent](#)' link attainment and academic rigour only to those facilitating subjects. Nicky Morgan's statements on these issues, herself holding a humanities degree, were troubling as they sidelined the benefits of such degrees. The [Times Education Supplement](#), [Times Higher Education](#), [Guardian](#), [Telegraph](#) and [Independent](#) all ran stories and responses to her comments. NAMHE [wrote](#) directly to her, urging the link to attainment to be re-thought. As NAMHE noted in our latter, music, in common with many of the creative arts, 'requires a high degree of application, self-motivation, and a strong work ethic. All these attributes not only represents very high degree of academic rigour, but are also easily transferable to other subjects' and careers within, related to, and outside the subject (Letter from NAMHE to Nicky Morgan, September 2014). Music can be studied as part of a well-rounded education, in combination with other subjects, deemed facilitating or not. There is a need to ask: what is being facilitated? In what ways are we enabling our pupils to achieve their best and to choose their own path that is the most rewarding for them?

The initial list of facilitating subjects was produced by the [Russell Group](#), with the intention of assisting students in selecting A Levels, which would provide them with the widest choice for future study at university. The, albeit unintentional, use of this list in terms of attainment, subject focus and policy, distorts students and parents perceptions of the arts and humanities. The UK has been known internationally for its excellence in the creative arts, and the threat to these subjects at school, college and universities will jeopardise the future of our creative industries. The response to these articles and letters has only drawn reference back to the Cultural Education Programme and not responded directly to the core of the concerns. This issue of facilitating subjects impacts upon: school advice to pupils and parents; parental advice; the financial fears and concerns over the future security of potential university students; it associates the arts with a higher level of risk. Perhaps because of



this perceived risk, traditionally named degrees have often fared better under the new fee regime than their mediatized associates.

Side by side with this argument has been the reform to A levels and GCSEs. The publication of the Department of Education's Revised [Subject Content for GCSE, AS and A Levels](#) (January 2015), follows a period of long consultation, to which notably the government received over 600 responses for music, far more than any other subject, and a clear sign of the continuing importance of musical education to the British public. There has been some progress: the removal of minimum lengths for compositions and performances enable specific content and the quality and diversity represented by the different styles and ensembles student create within and for to be recognised. The re-scoping of the content to encompass more classical music and to reflect more closely today's multi-cultural Britain is welcomed. There are concerns remaining though: the music profession consensus that process as well as product should be assessed has been ignored. In other words, the compositional process, planning, adaptation and development of a work should be considered as a sign of a student's attainment. Charting student's development over a course, and assessing progress, would enable the highest grades to be achieved by all. At present, the summative assessment point privileges those students from a secure financial background, whose parents can afford one to one instrumental (and music theory) tuition. Those who receive group tuition in class, without additional one to one tuition, are placed at a disadvantage. In the light of current swinging cuts to peripatetic music tuition across the country, this is a lost opportunity.

There is also the changing up-take of A Levels and BTEC course in music. As shown in the UCAS figures (below), there has been a decrease in up take of traditional arts A Levels, but this is matched with an increased up-take in the more vocational BTEC. The BTEC is awarded points equally or higher for university admissions purposes, but this ignores certain course content deficiencies which are notable once a student reaches university: the more vocational course developed self motivation and creativity but there is often a lack of theoretical skills, music literacy (in its broadest sense), research skills and writing skills, which are all core to a music degree and outlined as central in the [QAA benchmark](#) for the subject. Currently, there are signs that an A-Level in Music Technology will be re-launched: consultation is presently underway, with NAMHE involvement.



### Performing arts A levels 2010-2014 (JCQ, UK)

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Drama	15,598	16,059	15,139	13,864	13,080
% of A levels sat	1.94	1.85	1.76	1.63	1.57
Music	9,969	10,064	9,495	8,839	8,375
% of A levels sat	1.17	1.16	1.10	1.04	1.00
Performing arts (inc dance)	3,708	3,575	3,152	2,782	2,546
% of A levels sat	0.43	0.41	0.36	0.33	0.31

25/05/2015 Data from UCAS

### Performing arts BTECs 2012-2014 (Edexcel, UK)

	2012	2013	2014
Music	7,106	8,425	9,282
% of BTECs sat	2.8	2.8	2.8
Music technology	5,065	6,219	6,504
% of BTECs sat	2.0	2.1	1.9
Performing arts (inc dance)	15,678	17,893	18,499
% BTECs sat	6.3	5.9	5.5
Production arts	1,976	2,250	2,042
% of BTECs sat	0.8	0.7	0.6

25/05/2015 Data from UCAS

Helen Thorne, UCAS, at [Survival of the Fittest?](#)  
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## National Association for Music in Higher Education ([NAMHE](#))

NAMHE has acted as a hub for academics in music for years, fostering dialogue, a support network and a learning platform at its annual conference to share good practice. More recently, certainly since 2008, it has developed an advocacy role by necessity. With departments under threat NAMHE has spoken directly to VCs and deans within specific institutions, trying to support colleagues and the survival of the subject. This role, involving discussion and support of colleagues at Roehampton University, Lancaster University, University of East Anglia, and at the Institute of Musical Research, and others confidentially, has led us to develop an outward facing role and active strategy for advocacy.

NAMHE within the last two years has been active in the [GCSE A level consultation](#). We have contributed to exercises in the [16-19 accountability exercises](#). As an organisation firmly positioned to support the discipline throughout the UK, we have commissioned new research, most recently research into the Gender Equality Mark, appointing Dr. Dani Bogdanovic to do interviews, focus groups and an assessment of this new scheme, linked to Athena Swan Charter (the report is forthcoming at NAMHE's website).

In addition, we have surveyed the Postgraduate Taught (PGT) programmes, by sending a questionnaire to programme leaders, in order establish the range, size and scope of Music PGT programmes. This data will enable us to argue in support of departments regarding what is the average number and suitability for such programmes. Ultimately, we aim to support those departments currently under threat – small PGT programmes are fighting for survival across the UK.

Advocacy, however, requires an activist approach. Why activist? I am reminded of Stefan Collini's comment in his volume *What Are Universities For?* (2012), when he writes:

'Compelling and often devastating criticisms appear to have had little, or no effect on policymaking. The arguments have not been answered; they have merely been ignored. Rather than blaming academics for not speaking out sufficiently strongly, the conclusion... is that those who make policy are just not listening.'

As Collini makes clear, it is important to utilise an assertive voice at policy level, both within and beyond educational discourse, and within debates concerning arts education in particular.

To support our discipline, in response to the challenges outlined above, we are developing a series of videos that demonstrate the value of a music degree – without advertising a single department or specific degree programme. These videos take the generic issues affecting music departments, explore the issues concerning how we marketing and present our subject, as well as presenting a voice which can be readily understood and made relevant by policy makers, academics, parents and potential

students. Our Video project is ongoing and to date (May 2015) has five videos now live on Vimeo. One shows our [annual conference 2014](#), iterating the key themes concerning employability in the curriculum. One uses two [music students](#) to show what their average day during their degree encompasses. One takes two [music graduates](#) and illustrates how a music degree has been useful to their day jobs as a Change Manager and a Member of the Welsh Senate. The most recent video, shows an introduction to our recently commissioned research project on the [Gender Equality Mark](#), presented by Dr. Danijela Bogdanovic. Another video, which was shown during this keynote address, is the first of our videos showing a person in a position of influence, in this instance a well-known musician, with a music degree – [Alison Balsom](#). The importance of this video is not an emphasis on training a performer, but on what she has to say, significantly, about the breadth of her degree spanning other subjects, training her how to manage a portfolio career, a freelance career and how to market oneself in a mediatized world. Such videos have been distributed to NAMHE reps, departments and via the email list. NAMHE welcomes colleagues who wish to use these videos in their UK open days, under the condition that it is made clear that they iterate the value of a music degree in broad UK terms. It is notable that colleagues have found these both useful and relevant, with positive feedback and over 5000 views in the first week of launching them.

Our annual conference 2015 was held just after this keynote address, and address issues concerning the use of technology with music education within UK HEIs. It was held on May 5<sup>th</sup> at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in Glasgow, entitled Music – Learning – Technology. Importantly, the keynote address at the start of the day was led by six students, two from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, and one each from Bangor University, City University, Kingston University and Liverpool Hope University. Students represented a range of degree programmes and academic levels. My summary of the conference will be available from the [NAMHE](#) website.

## **Value and recognition**

Universities, managers and resource planners assess value of the subject against all subjects – metrics do not delineate between differencing space requirements and so on. As such, the long held argument has been to demonstrate the transferable skills and the wider impact on culture beyond the subject. Notable in this argument is the tendency to refer to the creative economy. The cultural industries brought in £77 billion to the UK economy according to the [Warwick Commission](#) (p. 12). It is true that the gross national product from the creative economy is large, but what we often ignore for our own purposes is that this industry includes IT and computing as well. Value goes beyond financial terms: the personal engagement and experience of our students is the most significant aspect of what music departments deliver on a daily basis.

Influential voices are invited to contribute to the debate regarding the value of music degrees via NAMHE's video which project aims to integrate a range of

voices, from those with some influence, to speak out about the benefits of a music degree which go beyond the obvious musical skills.

As an analogy, science can win a war through scientific inventions and treatments, but cultural and artistic forms foster communication and contribute to healing peoples and societies by bringing together people through a human condition – as Alison Balsom suggests, music generates communication across a range of peoples and communities. People interact in culture, not only through scientific discourse. Cultural diversity, understanding and acceptance rely on cultural activity, the diverse engagement of people within and across a cultural context. Many inner city London schools with extreme diversity have shown higher achievers and success rates – diversity has been used as a tool and catalyst for learning, to integrate everyone. Diversity is a value that needs wider recognition beyond financial terms.

Mangers require figures drawn from league tables, NSS tables, financial summaries and other institutional metrics, to validate the value and benefit of such degrees for the institution. The Employment figures from [HESA](#) from 2012-13 (currently the latest available) give Creative Arts and Design 90.8% employability in 6 months after graduation - by comparison, Computer Science gets 86.5%. Of course, there is huge variation between institutions, but 3 of the top 4 institutions listed in the Guardian's employment tables are [music institutions](#).

### **Funding as Privatization**

The introduction of £9000 fees brought with it a change to permitted student for those attaining AAB or higher: places for this level of achievement were unlimited, and latterly the removal of the student cap across the board. During the recent parliamentary election debates, Labour proposed to reduce fees to £6000: has they been elected, this would have raised questions regarding the student cap – with fees decreased and a reliance for the tax payer to subsidise HEI, there would have been an issue as to balancing the finances of a growing student population.

The real cost of the financial fight for survival is two fold: student loans have increased and the amount for repayment after graduation has increased; for academics, the pressure to generate income from external grant applications has increased greatly. In many institutions, promotion to senior academic roles is awarded only if the candidate has achieved external income. Income generation has become a key driver in promotion, job descriptions and appointment processes. Many Professorial appointments, and positions at Reader and Associate Professor level, now require colleagues to bring in around 15-30% of their income in external grant applications. The benchmark of income gained from external sources such as the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) as assessed in the Research Assessment Framework (REF) are evidence by expenditure. These are problematic metrics not least due to the low success rate of research grant applications, the changing nature of research funding and amount of funding available, and

moreover the issue that successful bids buy colleagues out from a proportion of their teaching. As external income becomes more important to run programmes offering vocational activities with professional standard technology external income departments are turning to other forms of external income, through hiring spaces, such as studios, to commercial bodies, offering consultation research, creating portfolios of external validations and offering international franchise degrees.

## **Possibilities**

It is not all bleak! As a creative discipline, we should be asking what can we do to develop our programmes, to protect our subject and importantly to advocate for the place of music across educational levels, not only to train musicians, but for the diverse range of skills musicians have which are widely called for in many industries, within and beyond those that are creative. Ultimately, we need to project a can do attitudes.

Curriculum design is central to recent debates. Students expect choice, employability skills and a breadth of opportunities. A broader application of skills beyond music, embedded within the curriculum has become essential. As Balsom notes in her video concerning the value of a music degree, it enabled her to learn how to 'manage your life': employability modules are a core part of most UK degrees. They often incorporate work placements, but importantly, they train students how to produce risk assessments, how to write CVs and Professional Development Plans, they seek to integrate ethical and practical considerations, budget management, events management, grant application training, as well as a range of technical skills for working in a variety of institutional, professional and commercial contexts. The political challenges facing music departments also become part of the critical training of students in such creative arts programmes.

Other possibilities open to music programmes include generating a safe environment for students to experiment both within and outside the curriculum, for student's to begin to establish a career portfolio and ultimately to contend with the risk of failure in a creative venture in a supportive environment. Risk has to be an acceptable attribute of such a learning environment if we are to honestly reflect industry and train students appropriately for their career portfolios.

As has been discussed often, including during the Higher Education Academy's summit on Creativity in the Curriculum, held in July 2014 in Lewes Sussex, curriculum and module planning needs to start at the end point: what do we want our students to learn, why is it important, and how do we train these skills?

It is important to integrate current issues effecting education and industry honestly – students become colleagues and peers and should be considered as professional partners and treated with respect: troubling figures regarding the attainment gap in UK HEIs, the drive to facilitate wider accessibility and

outreach and the inclusion of a broad cultural engagement can all feed the curriculum. Rather than linking music to other subjects, to train and support other subjects, we should avoid diluting our subject in preference of defending its value and projecting its wider role in our contemporary diverse society. There is potential for student research partners, student focus groups and student peer mentoring schemes to name a few initiatives.

## **A Career Portfolio**

A portfolio career is OK! In fact, it has become the norm for our subject both nationally and internationally. Communicating the nature of industry in an honest manner, without avoiding the problems in the field, is a necessary part of a music degree. Significantly, a degree in music is one of entrepreneurialism: students' artistic project work can become a tour, and develop their professional portfolio. Using a 'crit pit' – critical pitching arena – for placement funding, student businesses, collaborative projects, can assist in developing business negotiation and project pitching. Promotion, the balance of artistic work versus commercial realism, financial planning, web design, marketing, semiotics, written and verbal communication, critical thinking, team work and confidence building are all part of entrepreneurialism.

To foster the entrepreneur and to develop new ideas the curriculum should incorporate play. Play facilitates experimentation, testing, adaptation and critical thinking. Integrating employability skills in the curriculum means to incorporate vocational skills, applied learning and industry collaboration. As Professor Joe Bennett has proposed during his presentation at '[Survival of the Fittest](#)', the curriculum can include breadth by stealth: modules incorporate a range of skills beyond those made explicit in the module name. Speaking from personal experience, a music history module, for example, can go beyond that of training essay writing, to integrating critical reviews, writing for different audiences, presentations, marketing of music festivals, polemical writing, among others. An analysis module can train aural skills, team-work, writing, PC and software presentation skills, improvisation and performance, applying critical thinking in performance and creative practice, among others.

It is notable that one of our strongest resources in a university music department are our students. They bring with them a diverse range of skills, including, but not restricted to, performers, arrangers, accompanists, composers, sound technicians, producers, marketing savvy individuals, social media experts, events managers, freelance teachers and software designers. These students can be a useful resource, they could act as peer mentors, but moreover, they can also be utilised in-house on placements that utilise their skills for the benefit of the department, and for their career and CV development, and for personal financial gain to support their studies.

## The Future

Music degrees must engage with vocational skills: students must be able to do and apply their skills in practice. Where this requires specific facilities, technologies and software it is vital for universities to support departments in providing up to date professional equipment to ensure a current and relevant education is delivered.

A debate that has recurred in music education concerns that of musical literacy. [Literacy](#) refers to a broad range of musical skills, as outlined by a debate hosted by the Institute of Composing. Students and staff need to ensure they are literate in a range of musical software including Protools, Logic, Ableton Live, PD, Max MSP, Supercollider, Sibelius, Finale among others. Notation, software and aural literacy are all integral to ensuring a musician is fostered who has breadth of understanding, depth of knowledge, detailed critical thinking and an ability to apply themselves in a range of situations. The relevance of these skills must be iterated in a variety of manners: assessments can replicate industry tasks in order to iterate their relevance, importance and real-world scenarios. There has been discussion among a number of conferences and meetings of colleagues regarding the prior learning and attainment of students: if students' prior learning threshold is not what is expected, we cannot and should not blame the student – if students demonstrate potential, but have yet to achieve they should be supported to develop their potential. HEIs may need to offer greater induction to areas that might be deficient, whether they be in terms of literacy issues or practical skills.

Curriculum design can be produced in reverse: a gig, an art-work and the creation of a new business can contribute to a module, the module can utilise such creative work to promote wider learning. Student-led projects and events, incorporating peer assessment invest students' personal interests, choices and learning needs. Such portfolio, collaborative assessments could be assessed as a synoptic assessment – in other words, an assessment whereby students can be assessed on their particular contribution to a larger project, each demonstrating a range of skills.

In sum, we should avoid knowledge silos to ensure the value and benefit of our subject is shared beyond departments. Lateral thinking, collaboration, and wider connections are necessary to develop a national fight for the subject. Balancing the ethical issues of a university as an income generating business, as a charity with community outreach strategies, as well as educational aims. Departments could fruitfully do more to link to local schools, to collaborate with the local community: departments could offer the university resource beyond the university walls to ensure the next generation has access to music and are inducted to the option of further study.

The survival and development of the subject requires us as a discipline to utilise our core resource, our students, more effectively, while providing them with wider opportunities that are industry relevant. Ultimately, music can promote social inclusion; it can reveal the wealth of diversity within the student



body. Music, along with the others arts and humanities, has a central role in culture. It indoctrinates lateral thinking and acceptance.

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Subject Association Links:

NAMHE: <http://www.namhe.ac.uk>

SCUDD: <http://www.scudd.org.uk>

DanceHE: <http://dancehe.org.uk>

## **Biography**

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