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| **Name:** | **Joanna Murphy** |
| **Date:** | **29/10/18** |
| **Organisation: (if required)** | **The National Parent Forum of Scotland** |
| **Topic of submission:** | **Instrumental Music Tuition** |
| [x]   **I have read and understood the privacy notice about submitting evidence to a Committee.** [x]  **I am happy for my name, or that of my organisation, to be on the submission, for it to be published on the Scottish Parliament website, mentioned in any Committee report and form part of the public record.**[x]  **I understand I will be added to the contact list to receive updates from the Committee on this and other pieces of work. I understand I can unsubscribe at any time.** Non-standard submissionsOccasionally, the Committee may agree to accept submissions in a non-standard format. Tick the box below if you would like someone from the clerking team to get in touch with you about submitting anonymously or for your submission to be considered but not published. It is for the Committee to take the final decision on whether you can submit in this way.[ ] I would like to request that my submission be processed in a non-standard way.  |

**EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE**

**MUSIC TUITION IN SCHOOLS INQUIRY**

**SUBMISSION FROM The National Parent Forum of Scotland**

We are pleased the Education and Skills Committee has agreed to carry out an inquiry into music tuition in schools, as it is of great concern to many parents. We welcome the invitation to provide evidence within our key role in championing the parental voice at a national level.

The NPFS is a volunteer led organisation. We work in partnership with national and local government, and other organisations involved in education and child wellbeing issues, to ensure that parents play a full and equal role in education.

The NPFS was a member of the Instrumental Music Implementation Group (IMG), whose report was welcomed by Scottish Government. We believe the IMG’s recommendation on charging should still stand:

*There should be a general principle that pupils’ individual circumstances should not be a barrier to their ability to access and benefit from instrumental music tuition. Local Authorities should review their charging policies and concessionary schemes to ensure that pupils in their area are not prevented from learning a musical instrument because of their background, location, disability or financial circumstances. (IMG Report 2015)*

More recently, the NPFS is a member of the Music Education Partnership Group (MEPG). Although we are pleased the MEPG has set up a new working group, it does not help families currently having to decide if they can afford to continue with their child’s music tuition. We appreciate the budgetary pressure local authorities are under, but do not believe that charging for music tuition is ever appropriate.

We recognise that SPICe and other organisations will provide a clear outline of local authority charging across the country. The committee will also be aware of the wealth of evidence on the benefits of music; these are increasingly well understood and recognised. We have therefore concentrated on the real-life impact of these charges. It is important that the committee hears not just facts and figures, but the actual experiences of families.

We have gathered accounts, through social media and email submissions, from families across Scotland. Many children have not been able to take up tuition due to the charges, or have had to give up tuition due to new charges or increases.

Overwhelmingly, the word parents have used to describe their children who can no longer receive tuition is ‘*heartbroken’*. Many children have been forced to give up lessons, often after learning for several years, and are understandably truly upset, as are their families.

*“I am sad and angry that my son will no longer have the opportunities and benefits. We are just over the cut off for free school meals so are not able to get any subsidy but were barely able to afford the hire of the instrument so can’t afford the new charge.” (Parent)*

The laudable aim of our current Government is to achieve “equity and excellence” but the failure to protect instrumental tuition from a national level cannot possibly sit under this umbrella. We received many comments such as:

*“Fees are divisive and create a culture of means tested music.” (Parent)*

*“Fees result in education becoming a subsidised service, not one that is accessible to all.” (Parent)*

Scottish Government speaks of empowering our school communities, so must take actions to protect this vital method of empowering our young people. Learning a musical instrument gives children and young people opportunities to take greater responsibility for planning and managing their own learning. It also increases academic attainment so Scottish Government should be protecting funding in their aims to close the attainment gap.

*“When we were able to pay for lessons I could see improvement in school reports.” (Parent)*

Many children have had to give up other activities, such as a sport, in order to afford music tuition. This is an unacceptable when government and local authorities should be doing everything they can to encourage children to engage in activities that would help combat obesity and mental health issues:

*“In order for the lessons to continue my daughter had to stop not one but two dance classes. So I had to choose between her fitness and her love of music.” (Parent)*

In almost every submission, parents described their child’s increased confidence while learning an instrument, but sadly also described the drop in confidence when this ended:

*“Learning the instrument made her more confident and she even did a solo performance at the school show which she would never had the confidence to do before. Her confidence and friendship groups grew by learning an instrument, as well as her opportunities to perform in front of others and now this isn't happening*.” *(Parent)*

*“To discontinue now would be a huge disappointment to her. She has gained so much confidence over the years, having the opportunity to perform in public, as part of an orchestra. Until recently she also sang with NYCOS, however we have had to put that on hold due to the affordability of the increased music tuition.” (Parent)*

There is often a stigma surrounding Free School Meals and some parents described a similar feeling with having to give up instrumental music tuition. Their child felt excluded through not being able to start or continue with tuition, particularly when other children were able to:

*“I don't want them excluded in something else just because I am a single parent.” (Parent)*

*“She felt a little excluded as all other learners continued this year as their parents could afford it.” (Parent)*

We also heard from a parent whose child had a real awareness of the costs:

*“[My child] decided not even to take a letter to bring home to us because it was ‘a lot of money’. I only found out about the availability through a conversation with a friend.” (Parent)*

NPFS feel children who take N5 or Higher music will automatically be at a disadvantage if they have not been able to take up tuition beforehand in their chosen instrument. We firmly believe that instrumental music tuition is not extra-curricular (90% of Instrumental Music tuition occurs within the school day) and is an integral part of a broad general education. For example, as one parent told us:

*“You wouldn’t have a child sitting N5 art and design that had never drawn before.” (Parent)*

As overall uptake of music lessons has decreased (due to affordability issues), there is also a knock-on effect on those who can afford to pay. In many areas, schools are looking to cut or limit the availability of lessons altogether. For families who can afford it, private tuition is an option but this is not readily available in all more rural areas.

*“I worry that the tuition scheme will close as the number of students decreases. Another concern being, to further reduce costs the council may reduce tutors, justifying it by lack of numbers.” (Parent)*

*“Due to cuts there is no longer a music teacher at the school at all.*

*As my eldest daughter loves music I felt I needed to provide this aspect of her education for her myself. I waited for about 2 years to get a space with her.  There are not very many private music teachers available in my area.” (Parent)*

For children in schools where tuition is continuing, parents feel the children are not getting all of the benefits that they once were:

*“…he isn’t getting the full musical experience as there isn’t enough children to make up a band and put on performances.” (Parent)*

*“Numbers playing in school and authority orchestras are also down on last year and the problem will clearly compound itself year on year as more and more children are denied the opportunity to learn.” (Parent)*

*“Although we have continued with the lessons, there are many who have not. This has impacted on our local orchestra, which is run free of charge on a voluntarily basis by the music tutors. It is so sad to see such an amazing facility for young musicians being put in jeopardy due to decreasing numbers of young musicians.” (Parent)*

Instrumental music, in particular rhythmic training, has been shown to help those who have difficulties learning to read. There is evidence of enhanced intellectual development through engaging with music, yet we heard from parents who could not explore this possibility due to costs:

*“We have always had fees and we can't afford them but music is something both my children wanted to learn and I think it would have helped with their disabilities.” (Parent)*

*“My child has dyslexia and dyspraxia and learning guitar (as she is keen to do) is likely to help her fine motor skills, her reading abilities and her organisational skills, but our council has brought in charges this year that we can’t afford so she is trying to learn from you tube videos and it’s really not the same.” (Parent)*

NPFS believes there should never be a charge for instrumental tuition. We have heard too many families’ comments such as:

*“I have 3 naturally musical daughters who would love to learn themselves but even the subsidised classes offered by East Renfrewshire are way beyond our family budget.” (Parent)*

However, we acknowledge that some parents do believe a modest charge is acceptable. For local authorities that do charge, we suggest:

* Concessionary schemes must be more effective, such as working on a scale with a cap. Free school meals is the criteria for many of the discounts but many families are experiencing in-work poverty and do not qualify for them.
* What a local authority may consider to be reasonable for one child is very rarely acceptable for two or more children. Many parents describe it as ‘*exorbitant* or ‘*extortionate*’. Significant sibling discounts should always be offered.
* Local authorities should consider ways to make paying the fees more achievable, for example payment schemes as available in some authorities are helpful, so fees can be paid in weekly or monthly instalments rather than as a one-off large payment.
* Councils should consider discounts for group lessons, as charging the full rate of tuition for shared lessons is unethical. On parent compared it to: “*a council flat tenant being told they should pay full market value for their rent, but as the council is a bit short of money, they will need to share it with 2 or 3 other people who will also each pay the full rate for the flat.”*
* The processing of grants should not hold up tuition. A parent told us that:

*“until the grant was sorted they had to stop the lessons for over a month.”*

Although, not the main focus of the committee’s inquiry, we should draw attention to comments made by parents over the way children are selected for music lessons. Many families feel that it is unfair at best, and elitist at worse. Some attention should be given to communicating with parents how this process works in order to manage expectations. Parents who considered their fees to be affordable, also took issue with cuts in provision resulting in long waiting lists and are disappointed the Committees inquiry is not examining this.

*‘It’s not the cost but the fact they keep cutting the available places’.* (Parent)

Lastly, on a positive note, we commend the example of Glasgow City Council (GCC) which offers a free instrumental music tuition service across the city, with no costs at all attached. The GCC instrumental music service provided some examples from families who could not have paid for provision and benefited enormously from free provision and instrument hire:

*“One young person I taught had severe Autism and could barely cope with any interaction - after six years of faithfully attending violin lessons he was able, over time to take part in the school string orchestra, school orchestra, concerts, attend some regular classes, sit exams, interviews and in the end left school with a job and is still in full time employment! This particular family were not in a position to buy instruments or afford private tuition.” (Music tutor)*

*“A pupil lost her mum at Christmas time and came into Orchestra at City Halls that very week as she felt she was supported there and had a network of friends from across the city who she could interact with and help her get through that really difficult time - she stayed with the String Orchestra, then joined the String Ensemble and Symphony Orchestra and attended all until she left school. Her instrumental teacher in school encouraged her to apply for university, which she did and is now studying music and history at Glasgow University.” (Music tutor)*

*“Another child from a single parent family in the east end of the City was introduced to the Bassoon via recorder lessons where he had shown great aptitude. He was supported by the instrumental instructor and school with instrument loan and attended a range of bands and orchestras including eventually the National Youth Orchestra. He went on to study at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and is now working in the Middle East in a very prestigious School as Head of Attainment - without the input of free music instruction this would never have been possible.”*

 *(Music tutor)*

*“A young person from a single parent family was encouraged to attend school and ultimately go to university as a direct result of receiving his instrumental music lessons. He had been suffering from depression and was having extreme difficulty attending school - eventually with support and intervention from the Instrumental Music Service he successfully completed his Highers and Advanced Highers and has gone on to study this year at Napier University. The service has also helped him continue with his instrumental playing through bursary applications to purchase an instrument.” (Music tutor)*