

[Initial Teacher Education and the White Paper](#)

As promised, here is a quick reflection on the future of initial teacher education post the unveiling of the White Paper yesterday. There was little new information contained, and we'll have to wait to the Department for BIS white paper in January before a clearer picture emerges. However, the Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers has recently published a press release which contains a very good reflection on the key points. I am very happy to make this [available here](#).

I've also been given a [copy of a speech given by James Noble-Rogers](#) at a recent conference run by the [Standing Committee for the Education and Training of Teachers](#) which, whilst a bit longer, is a very interesting read.

[Music Education and the White Paper](#)

The publication of the White Paper heralds an important moment in this Coalition Government's reform of education in the UK. It sets out a series of proposals and allows us, probably for the first time, to see their vision clearly.

This has been a worrying period of time for music education. It is currently under a governmental review, being led by Darren Henley. So, it is interesting to examine this White Paper to see what, if any, conclusions can be drawn about music and its place within the school curriculum.

Please note that the following thoughts are solely my own, have not been shared with colleagues at MMU or any other organisation. Please note, unlike the White Paper itself I have also used technology to spell-check this document!

However, I would be interested to hear your comments about my analysis. There is also a pdf of this post [available here](#).

Another Revision of the National Curriculum

Firstly, there is going to be another revision of the National Curriculum. Despite this being the first academic year when the whole of Key Stage 3 is being taught the current version of the National Curriculum for the first time, the Coalition has made a clear decision that this is not fit for purpose. I will make no further comment here about this decision. Rather, I will merely state that I see, every week, excellent music teaching that is innovative and creative and inspired by the current curriculum framework.

When it comes to the primary and secondary curriculum, the general theme of the White Paper is to reduce what the Coalition sees as unnecessary prescription, bureaucracy and central control. Their view is that the National Curriculum in its current form weighs teachers down and saps their ability to be innovative and creative.

So, the White Paper proposes to review the National Curriculum over the next year or so, leading to the implementation of a new National Curriculum in September 2013. The next generation of the National Curriculum will, if you believe the White Paper, set out 'clearly the core knowledge and understanding that all children should be expected to acquire in the course of their schooling' (4.7). Part of this revision will be a greater focus on subject content (4.9). The final documentation will be 'slim, clear and authoritative (4.12). At this point, it mentions that parents should be able to use its contents to hold schools to account. The examples are

informative: English language and literature, core mathematical processes and science. **Note, no surprises here: these subjects are in!**

English Baccalaureate

The establishment of an English Baccalaureate has a prominent place in the White Paper. This will be awarded to students who secure 'good GCSE or iGCSE passes in English, mathematics, the sciences, a modern or ancient foreign language and a humanity such as history or geography'. **Note, no mention of the arts here.**

Schools will be keen to develop this award as there will be a separate record of the number of pupils getting this new award in the performance tables. Those schools that, in the words of the White Paper, 'succeed in giving their pupils a properly rounded academic education' will be more easily identified (4.22). **Note, arts subjects clearly fall outside this boundary. The White Paper does not say that they are not part of an academic education. But, by omission, I think we can see that the view is that the arts are clearly not thought of as academic nor worthy of inclusion in this award. It would have been easy to include the arts subjects within this award but someone decided that was not desirable.**

Paragraphs 4.27 onwards confirms this with more worrying rhetoric:

There is much of value that children need to learn and experience which sits outside the traditional subject disciplines – the languages, sciences, humanities and mathematics which make up national curricula across the globe.

Again, note the emphasis on supposedly 'academic' areas and a complete misunderstanding/misrepresentation of other countries' national curricula which do include the arts.

A Cultural Education

Para 4.31 sees one of the few (3) references to music in the White Paper. Here it is in full:

Children should expect to be given a rich menu of cultural experiences. So we have commissioned Darren Henley to explore how we can improve music education and have more children learning to play an instrument. The Henley Review will also inform our broader approach to cultural education. We will support access to live theatre, encourage the appreciation of the visual and plastic arts and work with our great museums and libraries to support their educational mission.

Fine words, but a little too late. Music education is lumped, alongside other arts, as part of a 'cultural education' package. Clearly by now, we see that it falls outside the core National Curriculum that will be put together and, it seems, left to schools (i.e. Headteachers) to decide how and when it is offered and to whom. **Note, the inclusion of Music (like other arts) in the curriculum will be at the whim of Headteachers or other curriculum managers.**

From other comments made by the Secretary of State in interviews on Radio 4, BBC Television and Radio 5 yesterday, it seems that he is imagining that schools will spend 50% of their time on the National Curriculum subjects, with the other 50% being at the discretion of the school. **Note, no prescription leads to no entitlement and no coherent, systematic and developmental progression for music education.**

At Key Stage 4, there is a prescription in the White Paper that schools will be encouraged to offer 'a broad set of academic subjects to age 16, by introducing the English Baccalaureate'. Well, as we have seen already, Music is clearly not conceptualised as an academic subject in this White Paper nor is it, or any of the arts, within the Baccalaureate. Note, I anticipate this leading to a reduction in course provision at Key Stage 4 in Music.

If all this sounds rather gloomy, do not forget that we have David Cameron's promise, made whilst standing alongside Gary Barlow at Brine Leas High School in Nantwich, for a national music competition! (For those of you interested, there is a good comparison here between the scandalous cutting of School Sports Partnership funding and the provision of a schools Olympic initiative instead; but the music competition will not be nearly as well funded).

Summary

So, in a specific conclusion for music education this White Paper:

- Defines Music, and other arts, as non-academic subjects;
- As a consequence, places Music outside the National Curriculum;
- Therefore, Music will not be a core entitlement for all children but will fall, instead, within a broader cultural curriculum;
- Precisely how that cultural curriculum offer is constituted and delivered is still being discussed, and the Henley Review will advise on that.

Therefore, I find myself unable to retract the statements I made an hour or so before the publication of the White Paper yesterday (published in my previous post).

For completeness, here they are again:

Prediction 1

Music will not be part of the new National Curriculum. It will fall outside the 50% of prescribed core subjects that the Secretary of State wants to legislate for. He says that in slimming the curriculum down schools will have more time to other things – he even mentioned Music as one of those 'other things' in his Radio 4 Today programme interview this morning.

Prediction 2

I say that removing Music from the core entitlement of a child's education will damage, irrevocably, the entitlement that all children have to receive a coherent, systematic and development music education. Whilst some will harp back to successes in music education within a previous golden era prior to a National Curriculum and the entitlement it represents, I say that times have changed. Many headteachers will conveniently ignore Music as a subject area within the curriculum, and leave it to a mish-mash of private, unregulated, extra-curricular provision for music (for 'music' here read 'instrumental learning') delivered by unqualified teachers.

Postscript

Finally, additional worries about a two tier system are still very prevalent. As we see in 4.14, academies and free schools will have the freedom not to follow the National Curriculum at all 'where they consider it appropriate' not to do so. But they will be required to teach a 'broad and balanced' curriculum. But this phrase, although having a historical resonance, is not defined. I anticipate that this will lead to many children not receiving any music education at all within their compulsory schooling.

Music out of the National Curriculum

On other matters, the Education White Paper (titled 'The Importance of Teaching') is published around 12.30pm today. I hope to make detailed comments on this tomorrow (in respect of

music, and, possibly, ITE).

Anyway, here is my prediction.

Music will not be part of the new National Curriculum. It will fall outside the 50% of prescribed core subjects that Gove wants to legislate for. He says that in slimming the curriculum down schools will have more time to other things – he even mentioned Music as one of those ‘other things’ in his Radio 4 Today programme interview this morning.

I say that removing Music from the core entitlement of a child’s education will damage, irrevocably, the entitlement that all children have to receive a coherent, systematic and development music education. Whilst some will harp back to successes in music education within a previous golden era prior to a National Curriculum and the entitlement it represents, I say that times have changed. Many headteachers will conveniently ignore Music as a subject area within the curriculum, and leave it to a mish-mash of private, unregulated, extra-curricular provision for music (for ‘music’ here read ‘instrumental learning’) delivered by unqualified teachers.

I look forward to retracting this statement around 1pm if the White Paper tells us something else. Please don’t call me a pessimist. I really hope I’m wrong. I’m also disappointed that other leaders in the field of music education have not publicly expressed their own views on this disgraceful policy.

[A rough road ahead for ITE in](#)

the university

Gove's plans to reform initial teacher education are ill thought through and will be a disaster. If HEI are removed lock, stock and barrel from their involvement, leaving ITE to schools – even specialist training schools, the consequences will be catastrophic. Schools do not have the skills or resources to do this well. It is not their core business. Headteachers often don't understand the processes involved in recruiting and educating young teachers. The best ITE is a partnership between HEI and schools. This is how it works in the vast majority of other countries. I can't think of a single country of our size that runs the system Gove is proposing.

Gove's reforms run against all the available evidence including, amazingly, the OFSTED report published only yesterday which states that HEI approaches to ITE are twice as successful as school based approaches

I was very grateful to the BBC Today Programme for asking the question I emailed to them for Michael Gove on their programme this morning. I asked them to question Gove on these matters, including the evidence in the Ofsted report. His only response was that 'he thought it was a better approach'. So much for evidenced-informed practice!

Also, I bet none of the policy makers have given any thought to the consequent effects on CPD opportunities run by HEI and also the large field of educational research that is developed and supported by academics across the country working collaboratively with schools, student teachers and others. I fear that much of this will be lost.

There is a very rough road ahead for those of us working within ITE. Time to start considering alternative career paths.

Sounds Active: A student perspective

I enjoyed working through [Sounds Active](#) (see [previous post](#)). However, for a princely sum I commissioned a typical 16 year old student who might use Sounds Active in their studies to write a short review. Here it is:

After playing around with the lessons and tutorials of this programme it has proved itself as a extensive interactive learning tool for those studying music tech. After the somewhat lengthy registration process, installation was a bliss and there was no glitches in the operation of the programme. I had a brief look at the tutorial which was pretty much self-explanatory and then moved on to the mountains of lessons offered, the 'Sound Section' is a great intro to the 'scheme' and I particularly enjoyed experimenting with the different harmonics and frequencies. Going on through the menus of lessons was rather tedious and maybe some animation (page turning?) between the pages wouldn't go a miss, however in saying this I must mention the actual content was flawless. As you move through the different lessons which are categorised under main headings, 'Sound', 'Spaces', 'Equalisation', you find that these are then categorised again into five tabs, thus giving the user the ability to jump to the section that they need without having to plough through hundreds of pages. All of the tabs include a summary section which covers the main points that you will be needing to remember, which when coming to exam season will be helpful for many students.

Ultimately after working through the previous 4 tabs the final tab gives you the chance to mix together a 16 track recording.

You can scroll through all of the tracks on the realistic mixing desk and mess around with the different dials and sliders with some 'interesting' results. But have no fear, for the more unaware student there is a step by step guide to making your mix of the song sound respectable and rather professional. The fact that all the previous work ties into the final 'performance' gives the user a feeling of success and is quite enjoyable to hear all the sound and effects learnt fall into place.

From a design perspective, I liked the stripped back styling and background image (singular), maybe some other images to place in the background relating to the different tabs? Also a search function would be helpful for, well, searching. These issues though are picky when looking at a great learning tool with some fantastic and interesting information which, when appealing to a teenage audience, is something of a miracle.

[Sounds Active: A great new resource for sound engineering](#)

More and more teachers are having to teach elements of sound engineering in their GCSE, BTec and A level courses. From my work with students doing initial teacher education, I know that this is often an area of their subject knowledge that needs strengthening. Last week, I had a meeting about this new piece of software – [Sounds Active](#) – which is a fantastic addition to the tools that teachers and students can use to learn about all aspects of the recording process.

Sounds Active is a comprehensive set of materials, together

with many interactive components, that lead you logically through the recording process in five lessons. You learn how to record, process and mix recorded materials through the use of interactive tools culminating in a multi-tracked recording and learn about important principles and techniques of recording along the way.

Anyway, I would highly recommend it (and I'm not on a commission) so please request your demo disk ([details on their website](#)). I've also got a box of demo disks to give away. There are also two very helpful videos exploring Sound Active for you to view accessible from their [home page](#).

When is a free school not a free school?

[The Guardian newspaper are reporting today](#) that four new free schools have been given initial approval by Michael Gove. This increases the number of free schools from 16 to 20. My son attends one of these schools – Sandbach School. Here is a section of article:

At least four new applications to open free schools, part of a generation of “independent state schools” led by demand from parents and teachers, will be given initial approval by the education secretary, Michael Gove, tomorrow.

The latest free school applications to win approval from the government include All Saints school in Reading; Cuckoo Hall school in Enfield, north London; Sandbach school in Cheshire; and the Bradford free school group.

Sandbach is a boys' school that used to be private. It is

officially listed as an independent school, but is now comprehensive and publicly funded. The school was turned down for an academy conversion this year because of its independent status and applied to be a free school instead.

You might presume from that description that the school has become a free school. But you'd be wrong. To set up a free school, an existing school, or a group of people who want to create a new school, have to work through a four staged process (preparation, proposal, full business case and pre-opening). Conversations I have had with senior managers at the school today have revealed that the school has only recently submitted the free school proposal form to the DfE. They have a number of questions that they are still awaiting responses to from the DfE and have not put together a business plan, i.e. they have not even reached stage 3. In their minds, this is all very much at the exploratory stage and no final decisions have been made.

So, is this misreporting by The Guardian. I think not. It seems to be a deliberate attempt by the DfE to inflate the potential number of free schools (at least by 1!) and is a misrepresentation of the school's position at the current time.

Sandbach School may become a free school in the fulness of time. If so, it will be done properly, with a due consideration to the various issues and in consultation with the pupils, parents and wider community of Sandbach. At the present point of time, none of this has happened.
