

Jonathan Savage asks DO QUALIFICATIONS MATTER?



As I write this column I am sitting in my office at the Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM), where my university, Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), delivers its two PGCE courses (Music, and Music with Specialist Instrumental Tuition). The soundproofing is not what it should be, and as a result the sound of students practising their latest sonata or aria is wafting up and down the corridors. It is hard not to be impressed by conservatoires like the RNCM. They offer world-class training for musicians and composers, and long may this continue. But what do they offer aspiring music teachers?

The recently published Henley review of the funding and delivery of music education contained some interesting ideas about qualifications for the music teacher. Recommendation 24 introduced the idea of a 'Qualified Music Educator' (QME). This is something that many welcomed: everyone who works as a music teacher deserves the opportunity to gain a recognised qualification.

But Henley's 25th recommendation suggested that *all* conservatoire students should gain the QME award through their undergraduate studies. Conservatoire staff have expressed alarm at this, and those studying undergraduate music courses at university may well feel undervalued too: one could argue that university students represent a broader range of musical skills and expertise, more suited to education than the skills of conservatoire students.

If Henley's recommendation is acted upon, those who obtain QME status will become the significant proportion of music teachers in our

“ EVERYONE WHO WORKS AS A MUSIC TEACHER DESERVES THE OPPORTUNITY TO GAIN A RECOGNISED QUALIFICATION ”

schools over the next five years. In other words, we will lose the centrality of the postgraduate, qualified teacher of music, on a par with qualified teachers of mathematics, science, geography and so on.

Can you think of any other subject area that would be willing to see itself represented in our schools by graduates whose qualifications are significantly lower than the standard PGCE? How would the science community, for example, respond to the idea that in order to teach science you could forget training for a PGCE and just do some extra work within an undergraduate science degree?

Perhaps you think these concerns are a little premature and melodramatic. If so, I would ask you to reflect for a moment on the figures for initial teacher education in 2011-12 that have already been announced by the coalition. The number of secondary music initial teacher training places, on both HEI courses and employment-based routes, has been slashed by around 40% from 690 to 390. This cannot be explained solely by demographics or a teacher surplus.

Could it be that policy decisions have already been made that will affect how music education is delivered in our schools? We could be looking at a future where graduates with QME status will be employed by headteachers looking for cheaper alternatives to full-time, qualified teachers, to teach a subject which is no longer part of the national curriculum and has only a limited cohort (even by today's standards) of students at Key Stage 4 and above.

Susan Hallam's and Andrea Creech's recent book, *Music Education in the 21st Century* in

the United Kingdom (Institute of Education, University of London), is well worth a read. Its final chapter opens with the following statement: '[Music education in the UK] is arguably the best in the world... The key to its success is the regular provision of general music classes and extracurricular instrumental tuition in primary and secondary schools on a weekly basis, delivered by well-qualified and enthusiastic teachers.'

I echo these sentiments. Music education in the UK is, in my opinion, world leading. But it is under severe attack. Music's place on the national curriculum is under threat; the insensitive imposition of the EBacc on schools has marginalised it at Key Stage 4, with likely knock-on effects at Key Stage 5 and beyond; and the provision of instrumental music services is looking increasingly fragile as local authorities make difficult decisions about budgets.

Like Hallam and Creech, I would argue for every child's entitlement to a coherent, systematic and developmental music education. Music education in the UK is not perfect, but it does try to give a quality experience to every child. At the centre of this experience are well-qualified teachers working in our schools. Do we want to continue to educate teachers on a par with other subjects through quality courses at postgraduate level? Or are we happy to see a new workforce assume responsibility for teaching our children with a qualification equivalent to a module or two at undergraduate level?

Inspired to respond?

Email music.teacher@rhinegold.co.uk

Tweet @MusicTeacherMag

Write Music Teacher, 241 Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC2H 8TF

Jonathan Savage is a reader in education at the Institute of Education, Manchester Metropolitan University. His research interests include implementing new technologies in education, cross-curricular approaches to teaching and learning, creativity and assessment. He runs an active blog at jsavage.org.uk and can be followed on Twitter: @jpsavage

*NEXT MONTH

Paul Harris asks: *what does your instrument mean to you?*