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The Educational
Institute of Scotland

MSP Briefing on Instrumental Music Provision



STAND UP
MUSIC
FOR QUALITY EDUCATION

February 2025

EIS MSP Briefing: Instrumental Music Provision

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Purpose of this briefing

This briefing aims to highlight the significant concerns that the EIS, Scotland's largest teacher trade union, has about the ongoing erosion of Instrumental Music Services (IM Services) in Scotland, and the lack of progress on implementing the SNP Manifesto commitments¹ on instrumental music tuition.

Why raise this now?

With Local Authority budgets being stretched more than ever, and many councils exploring ways of achieving savings, IM Services are again at the forefront of proposed cuts. Our concerns focus on the following issues:

- Actual and proposed cuts to Instrumental Music Teacher (IMT) numbers in several local authority areas
- Actual and proposed cuts to IMS budgets in several local authority areas
- The reintroduction of charging for ensembles in some local authorities
- The impact of these cuts and charges on participation in instrumental music tuition and outcomes for children and young people

As local authorities review budgets this year, we would urge you to be alive to any proposed cuts to instrumental music tuition and to continue to defend its provision for the benefit of children and young people and for society as a whole.

Scottish Government Manifesto Commitments

The SNP Manifesto 2021 set out three inter-linked commitments in relation to instrumental music tuition:

1. To ensure instrumental music lessons are delivered free of charge, abolishing fees for music and arts education, including instrumental music tuition in schools
2. To mainstream music, including instrumental music tuition, as a core subject in Scotland's education system
3. To deliver GTCS registration for Scotland's school-based instrumental music teachers - creating a professionally-recognised national music teaching force.

When these manifesto commitments were announced, they were roundly welcomed, particularly as they were set in the wider policy context of removing

¹ [SNP Manifesto 2021 by HinksBrandwise - Issuu](#), pg 61-63

cost barriers to education, with a pledge to develop a sustainable and funded model for future years.

Despite the initial action to abolish fees as part of its 100-day plan, the Scottish Government has yet to advance the other manifesto commitments which were designed to complement and support engagement in instrumental music tuition in Scottish schools.

Regrettably, no long-term sustainable funding model has been brought forward by the Scottish Government, as yet. Whilst the Scottish Government has provided additional funding to local authorities to assist in meeting increased demand, and this is welcome, the quantum has remained constant at £12m over the last three years, representing a real terms cut in the allocation of resources.

The Need for Investment in, and Growth of, IM Services

The EIS welcomed the SNP manifesto commitments, which for the first time, gave Instrumental Music Teachers (IMTs) some reassurance both in terms of continuity of employment but also in relation to the ongoing commitment to widen participation in music education for all children and young people, especially for those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

We were clear, however, that the equitable delivery of instrumental music tuition across Scotland would require to see investment in IM Services and growth in the number of IMTs, to ensure that all children and young people who wished to participate in instrumental music tuition could do so.

What is evident from Improvement Service IMS survey data since 2021 is that there has been insufficient investment and growth to meet demand.

- **Increasing Demand/Participation**

The Improvement Service IMS survey data 2024² clearly shows the significant increase in the number of pupils participating in instrumental music tuition since the pandemic. It states that:

- In 2023/24, **65,985** pupils participated in instrumental music lessons with their local authority service at some point over the course of the year (the highest number from this survey so far, with 9.5% of the school roll participating)³. This represents a 7% increase in participation in one academic year;
- 2023/24 also saw a significant increase in pupil participation in additional activities offered by IMS. In 2021/22, just over 10,329 pupils participated in these activities, rising to 15848 in 2022/23. This year the figures rose by a further 16% to **18378**.⁴

² [Instrumental Music Services: Results from the IMS Survey 2024](#)

³ [Instrumental Music Services: Results from the IMS Survey 2024](#), p3

⁴ [Instrumental Music Services: Results from the IMS Survey 2024](#), p20

Given the importance of instrumental music tuition, and music education more widely, on the holistic development and wellbeing of children and young people, these statistics are encouraging and demonstrate that barriers to engagement are beginning to be removed.

- **Unmet Need**

However, demand continues to outstrip capacity, primarily as a result of staffing and accommodation issues. **Only three local authorities reported that they were able to offer places in instrumental music lessons to all pupils who were interested in 2023/24.** This compares with five local authorities in the previous year and of the remaining three, one indicated that they could not sustain this level of provision beyond 2023/24. The survey report makes it clear that demand is extremely high, in many cases higher than it has ever been.

The other twenty-nine local authorities are operating waiting lists. In some areas, the level of demand was vastly higher than supply. Highland Council had around 500 pupils on their waiting list and Angus Council reported that this was 258 pupils. Renfrewshire Council could only accommodate around one third of those who were interested in taking lessons.

Waiting lists and selection procedures are being adopted to try to manage this practically but how can this deliver equitable provision across Scotland? A child's right to learn a musical instrument will come to down to postcode and how long the waiting list is. ***How does this sit with the Scottish Government's commitment to removing barriers to engagement and providing access to free instrumental music tuition for all?***

- **Falling numbers of IMTs**

While the number of pupils participating in instrumental music tuition continues to rise, the number of IMTs and growth of IM Services has not kept pace with this increased demand. In addition to issues about workload and the health, safety and wellbeing of IMTs, this also gives rise to concerns about the potential impact on the delivery of quality teaching and learning, with pressure in some areas to increase the size of group numbers.

The Improvement Service survey reports illustrate the extent of the problem, showing a large decrease in the number of IMTs in 2018/19, which continued to slowly decline until 2020/21 when numbers reached their lowest recorded figure. In 2021/22 and 2022/23, the number of IMTs (FTE) saw small increases, but still remain lower than in 2017/18. In 2023/24, IMT numbers grew by less than 1%, while pupil numbers rose by 7%. Since 2013/14, the number of IMTs (FTE) has fallen by 3%⁵.

⁵ [Instrumental Music Services: Results from the IMS Survey 2024](#), p17

Cuts to IM Services across Scotland

The EIS has recently gathered information from across Scotland about proposed cuts and charges and the picture is grim. Many authorities are making proposals which, if implemented, would have a devastating impact on instrumental music provision.

IMTs' Contribution to Education

IMTs continue to deliver a vast amount of high-quality music education in challenging circumstances. The significant increase in the number of children and young people participating demonstrates the value placed on this aspect of school education. It is clear that demand for instrumental music lessons outweighs the resources currently allocated to it by local authorities.

IMTs also play a significant role in delivering National Qualifications in Music. For some courses e.g. Higher Music, performance constitutes 60% of the assessment⁶. Pupils perform their instrumental pieces best with input from highly skilled, professional IMTs.

Without adequate investment in IMTs, the achievement of music qualifications will decline, which would be disastrous given the recent uptick in entries for Music at N4, N5, Higher, which we have seen as numbers build again as we emerge from the pandemic. Advanced Higher levels⁷ over the period have remained fairly constant.

Subject	2019 Entries	2020 Entries	2021 Entries	2022 Entries	2023 Entries	2024 Entries	Change 2023-2024
N4 Music	1,238	1,260	917	1,285	1,295	1,400	+8%
N5 Music	7,203	7,633	8,301	7,657	7,555	7,730	+2%
Higher Music	5,070	5,090	5,220	4,935	5,060	5,180	+2%
Advanced Higher Music	1,700	1,650	1,865	1,755	1,775	1,745	-1.5%

This strong and widening appetite across NQ Music must be supported.

However, we cannot look at the statistics in the senior phase of education in isolation. Unless there is investment in music education, and instrumental music tuition, as part of the Broad General Education, with children and young people having access to tuition from Primary school, then they may not have the opportunity to develop the requisite skills to meet the practical aspects of qualifications in the senior phase - a prospect which will give learners from well-off backgrounds, who may be able to access tuition privately, an advantage in

⁶ [Higher Music course specification](#)

⁷ [Statistics 2021 - SQA](#)

achieving National Qualifications, and which will potentially widen the poverty-related attainment gap.

The equitable access of all pupils to instrumental music tuition from Primary is, therefore, critical if the policy objectives set out in the manifesto commitments are to be achieved. ***Scotland cannot return to the time when 'who pays, plays'.***

The value of music education: supporting achievement, attainment and health and wellbeing

Music, of course, has value in and of itself. Music is universal and omnipresent. How many hours in a row do you ever go without listening to music, turning on the radio, using a streaming service, going to a concert? Would you want to live in a world without music? If the answer is no, then music must be valued more, for its intrinsic worth. However, music also contributes significantly to children's and young people's achievement, attainment and health and wellbeing.

There is a vast amount of evidence about the value of studying and playing music⁸. IMT members of the EIS have observed and actively contributed to, the wide range of benefits to pupils gained from learning a musical instrument, including increased confidence, improved organisational skills, enhanced literacy and numeracy, the development of collaborative skills and increased focus and concentration.

In the wake of the pandemic, the social aspects of music have played a vital role in healing the isolation which many children and young people experienced, equipping learners to work individually, in both small and larger groups.

It is a form of support for children and young people with additional support needs or mental health challenges, providing a vital outlet for expression or a calming influence. Any cuts to IM Services are likely to hit these learners, for whom there are obvious benefits, hardest. The specific nature of instrumental music tuition – smaller groups, practical learning – is exactly what many learners with ASN need.

We are concerned that Scotland may return to a scenario where only children from well-off families can learn to play an instrument. This is unjust and unacceptable. We would urge you to argue for the ongoing provision of free access to music education for all.

Consequences of the continued erosion of IM Services

Unless immediate action is taken to support IM Services, the consequences will be dire, including:

⁸ Music Education in the 21st Century in the UK: Achievements, analysis and aspirations, Eds. Hallam and Creech, 2010; the impact of instrumental music learning on attainment at age 16: a pilot study. Hallam and Rogers, B. J. Music Ed. 2016 33:3, 247–261, Cambridge University Press 2016

- Significant **job losses** among skilled professional IMTs at a time when IMT numbers are a serious concern
- **Undermining of the delivery of the Scottish Government's own manifesto commitments on instrumental music tuition**
- A **devastating impact** on instrumental music tuition in schools, damaging pupils' educational experience and stopping untapped talent from being identified and developed
- An **erosion of Scotland's schools' contribution to the cultural life** of the country.

At this time, we need to nurture talent, not create barriers to its discovery.

What can you do?

MSPs

We urge you to:

- Add your support to the EIS campaign to defend instrumental music tuition, as an important component of the curriculum and as an integral aspect of education
- Explore with schools in your constituency the impact which cuts to funding for the delivery of instrumental music tuition would have on the holistic development of learners, on learner experience and on the health and wellbeing of IMTs, working in difficult circumstances at this time
- Discuss with local authorities the results of your findings and the imperative for sufficient funding for IM services and promote positive action to address the concerns highlighted in this briefing
- Encourage local authorities to defend the service, reject cuts and find ways of continuing to offer quality instrumental music lessons without charge
- Discuss the issues highlighted in this briefing within the Scottish Government - defend instrumental music tuition, with sufficient dedicated funding, to ensure that every child who wishes, can receive quality instrumental music lessons and benefit from the positive contribution that music makes to health and wellbeing.

Questions?

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