**Tim’s story**

**Tim** has retired from working full time in music education after a long and varied career. Tim still holds several voluntary roles that contribute towards his continued involvement in the discipline area. Tim is the Independent Chair of various music hubs across the United Kingdom and is a Trustee in an organisation that supports and brings together groups and individuals working within music education, making contribution to sustain the relevance of the organisation. He says: ‘I tend to be the grumpy old man as well, having been around for a long time’.

Tim is also studying towards his Doctorate in Education (EdD), exploring outstanding practice in music education. He is looking into several English secondary schools, exploring ‘outstanding’ practice (using Ofsted terminology) and opportunities for young people in music education. As a part of his study, Tim is interested in the views of Head Teachers; they ‘have to have a belief in that they see what music does for young people’ – that it can be economically viable, a selling point of the school, enhancing retention and leading to longevity of staff service.

Tim was brought up in Wales. He remembers that his ‘primary school music [experience] was horrendous’, where he was required to sing ‘sing tonic sol-fa’. The music culture of the school was influenced by the Welsh Eisteddfod, and choral singing was a significant part of his music education at this time. Tim’s parents would take him to the local chapel to sing; ‘it was horrendous, it was absolutely horrendous’. Tim had a piano a home and was taught by an ‘old-school’ piano teacher; ‘it just didn’t work for [him] at all’. He attended the local secondary school in the mid-60s, which was regarded as a good school for music. His music teacher here was an ex-army violinist. Tim did well at Arnold Bentley’s test, and as a result, was offered instrumental lessons in school. Tim also attended trumpet lessons on Saturday mornings, which his parents had to pay for. Around two to three months later, Tim was invited to play in the assembly orchestra. There was ‘no compromise in the quality of the repertoire played’, for example, the repertoire included Bach’s Brandenburg pieces, but was adapted accordingly. Tim the joined the Local Authority music centre’s junior orchestra, which he could use a free bus to get to.

During Tim’s childhood, he experienced a difficult family loss, so music and hockey became his interests to focus on. Tim recalls: ‘it’s always been a challenge for me between music and sport’, having to juggle various commitments. Participation in extra-curricular offerings ‘was natural’ for Tim. When discussing traditional notation, Tim states that: ‘I’m the least accomplished musician to have done what I have managed to do … there was no alternative [to reading traditional notation]’. Popular music was not a part of the curriculum, and he ‘wasn’t channelled in that direction at all’. There was not a lot of creativity in the curriculum, but there was a lot of theory. Tim remembers that ‘nothing special’ happened in his school curriculum music experiences. His school then appointed a new Head of music, who ran a choir for girls. Tim joined the local County Orchestra, but ‘failed’ his audition for the National Youth Orchestra of Wales. He took his O-level in music and achieved the equivalent of a B grade. By this time, Tim was playing full symphonies in the County Orchestra, although there was no culture of practicing in school in the practice rooms.

Tim then began to develop an interest in modern music and composition, leading him to study music at York University in the early 70s. He was ‘blown away by [the] musicianship’ of [his] peers who were ‘far in advanced of [him]’. He was immersed into a new culture of seeing his peers practice around the music department, which had a ‘completely alien feel to [him]’. Tim ‘struggled a bit’. He often spent more time practising sports than practicing for the orchestra. Tim says: ‘I was never really a part of the musical crowd’. He socialised with the sports teams rather than his fellow musicians. Tim studied conducting as a part of his degree. The music education projects that he was involved with were the most interesting aspect of his degree, which were facilitated by John Paynter. ‘You could relate to John Paynter’, highlighting the importance of positive relationships between students and teachers – Tim ‘looked up to John’, ‘[he was] just a lovely man’. Although Tim was involved with the music projects, only the music education students were able to go into schools to implement them as a part of their course. Tim recalls making a video to be used in schools, which had practical application. He aspired to join the British Broadcasting Corporation education department.

Tim comments that: ‘I’ve always described myself as a musicologist, rather than a performer’, and preferred to conduct ‘with my back to the audience’ instead. ‘I got by, basically’, although Tim did nearly quit after six weeks into his degree, but was persuaded to stay. Tim wasn’t able to do his Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) at York without having completed a music education degree (rather than straight music). Instead, Tim went to a university in North Wales, which he regarded as ‘abysmal’. There was a difference in culture in comparison to York which was much more formal. It was also the first year that the University had ran secondary course. During his course, Tim met an ‘amazing’ Head of Music who said the ‘kids have to identify with [him]’. After this, Tim then ‘fell into teaching’.

Tim got a job as a music teacher in South England. ‘Music was good [there]’. It was a two-teacher department and Tim was afforded the freedom to bring his school curriculum ideas into the classroom. Tim facilitated composition and conducted the school band. It was a fairly new school and the tradition was still building. Staff were ‘liberal in discipline practices’. Tim was ‘still learning [his teaching skills and knowledge]’ in this job. He wasn’t a pianist so he was also developing his piano skills. There was no existing scheme of work in place as such, ‘so [Tim] could do what [he] wanted’, but lacked the knowledge of how to design a scheme of work from his teacher training. After three years, Tim then moved to Northern England to progress in a school that held a different ethos akin to a grammar school ethos, despite it being a comprehensive school. There was a scheme of work in place this time, but it didn’t include much practical work. Tim had initially turned the job down due to a lack of practical music-making observed during a visit. Tim’s ethos was influenced by the schools music project and practical music-making. ‘Music was much much more classically oriented’ in this school. Although Tim’s orchestral upbringing was mainly focused on classical music and brass bands, a wind band was present at his new school. Tim then had to develop his practice in this area. The school held a huge library of chamber music. Students there were ‘moulded’. They were getting their instrumental lessons for free ‘so you had a hold on them’ to participate in ensembles; they were required ‘to give something back’ to the school. The pressure of ‘you *will* be in an ensemble’ was characteristic of this time. The department later ‘began to allow percussion and guitar into peripatetic lessons’ as the ‘pressure was there’ from students to learn these instruments.

Tim’s Master’s degree was based on student and parental perceptions of extra-curricular music activities at school. During his time in post, ‘numbers rocketed’ for those wanting to study music for General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) in the 80s, with around 45-60 studying in each cohort. The school also had between eight to 20 A level students. Tim took the school ensembles to Music for Youth competitions. The school was awarded ‘specialist arts status’, and Tim became the Director of performing arts. Tim completed his National Professional Qualification for Headship and was the school union representative. At his point of departure from the school, approximately 300 students were learning an instrument in school. However, they had to pay for the lessons by this point due changes in local authority funding streams. Despite this, an ‘explosion’ of interest in music occurred at the time of GCSE establishment. Tim sat on a local board of a music festival and tried to draw upon the American band tradition and elements of jazz in practice due to wider experiences. There were trustees of the school who were supportive of music and the subject was well-funded. The department received funding for extra-curricular music, in addition to funding for the music curriculum.

Tim then got a new job to support schools with applying for and maintaining their arts specialist status, working in this role between 2005 - 2011 for the specialist schools and academies trust. At this time, the idea of specialism was important in policy. This was a ‘very privileged job’ due to the opportunities and connections available through this role. However, when the coalition government came in, Tim ‘was made redundant’ due to a change in funding and priorities. In 2011, Tim led a music service. He was aware that the new National Plan for Music Education (NPME) was coming to make Local Authorities more accountable for music funding in schools and restructured the music service accordingly. Tim retired in Aug 2019. Tim says: ‘I don’t think many people have got my sort of background really, he says bigheadedly, but there you go’. He regards the NPME as a ‘very clever ruse to keep funding to local authorities to run above school level music’, to run music services and make Local Authorities accountable. Tim was part of a bid to make music services more school-based, but was unsuccessful. Tim agreed that Local Authorities need to be accountable for music funding and that budget should be distributed more fairly for each child. However, he is not convinced that whole class instrumental teaching is the right way of facilitating music in schools due to a lack of sustainability.

When teaching in schools, Tim worked with the art department and set pupils for music according to their levels of musical experience and interest. The scheme of work for each class was the same, but was differentiated for instrumentalists (usually in the top set); ‘it worked for [him]’. Tim uses the term ‘musical experience and interest’ as ‘[he doesn’t] like to call it talent, [he] call[s] it experience’. Those pupils who opted for GCSE had their peripatetic instrumental lessons funded by the school as it was considered a part of the course. Tim says: ‘I’m passionate that young kids should have the best possible opportunity to become musicians through the school curriculum’. His belief in this has not changed over time. From a practical point of view, musicianship is being able to express yourself through an instrument or voice, being participatory; ‘the standard doesn’t really matter’, so long as there is enjoyment and development. Tim states that ‘music is different to the other arts, in that you need something else to do it [i.e. to play an instrument], unless you’re a singer’. Tim ‘pushed’ the ‘open orchestra’ movement in his last teaching job, as it allows for freedom and experimentation. ‘You have to try to expose kids to a wide a range of music as you possibly can’. Tim says: ‘my musical diet in school was classical, but I couldn’t do this with the kids I taught’. Being able to provide musical accompaniment for pupils is important, either on piano or guitar; ‘totally important’.

Tim reflects on teacher training in the current climate. ‘I have grave issues with the quality of teacher training these days’. ‘When I’ve looked around at music festivals, I haven’t seen any real quality late 20-year-olds directing ensembles and sort of stuff like that, but perhaps that’s the longevity thing, it takes a long time to do that’ – it’s ‘just a feeling’. Tim questions how students should be prepared to conduct and whether this features in a teaching training curricula. It’s ‘an abuse of education’ if a teacher was unable to conduct according to the ability of children within an ensemble. ‘There are things you can learn from a conductor for all lessons’, for example, voice control, and being aware of and engaging all pupils in different positions around the room.

Tim thinks about problematic policy for music education. ‘The English Baccalaureate (EBacc) gets in the way of students progressing beyond the National Curriculum entitlement, and academisation gets in the way of everybody’s opportunity to have a musical experience within the curriculum’. These are the two main barriers to musical progression within the curriculum. Regarding the NPME, ‘you will never get music as an important influence on young people’s lives without it being statutory and sustainable financially’. The funding that goes to music hubs cannot provide the intention of learning an instrument for a whole term, for example in rural areas. Hubs are lacking funding and teachers required. The NPME is a ‘great policy intention, but [has] no universality of implementation‘. Tim also questions why there is a Model Music Curriculum (MMC): ‘is it there because [music is] recognised as failing’, possibly due to lack of quality of teacher training? Tim believes that ‘the system is biased against the state school’. For example, National Youth Music Orchestras receive funding, yet recruitment is fairly equal from stage, private and state schools – despite there being many more students in state schools across the country. Thus, those from state schools are disadvantaged in terms of funding allocation for such schemes. Tim questions the quality and the potential for students who have experienced whole class instrumental teaching to go on to play in National Youth Orchestras in later years. When considering the Ofsted Research Review for music education, Tim wonders whether teachers have ‘got the time to read it’. Tim says: ‘I think music teachers in their training need to have advocacy training, because I would always attend the Head of Department meeting and I would always say something about what was on the agenda, and I would always put a musical slant on it, as I think music needs to contribute to the whole school’. There is also a clear deficit in funding and resources for music in state schools compared to private schools in various other subject areas in the Levelling Up agenda.

During his career, Tim attended a music education conference in Chicago on two occasions. Tim participated in a millennium music tour and took 100 students with him – a choir, string group, wind band and guitar ensemble. Tim had to fundraise to make the tour possible and trialled the tour with his family prior to taking his students. ‘This was [his] ambition to do this for the kids’. ‘The tour was a triumph’, but Tim did encounter difficulties along the way, for example having to send musical instruments separately (which didn’t arrive immediately), manage their broken-down bus in America on the way to Crater Lake, and support student personal challenges. Although he had huge logistics to manage, it was a professional triumph, as the ‘kids still think about it’. One of Tim’s most painful experiences in music education was when he had to fight and advocate for a student to take A level. They had not met the criteria that the Head teacher had set to make them eligible for the option route, but had great musical skills and knowledge. Tim was successful in advocating for the student to study music at A level in the school, and the student then went on to study music at a conservatoire.

Tim has’ more worries than [he has] hopes’ for the future of music education. Tim says: ‘I worry about quality of teacher training, I worry about the status of music in the curriculum, I worry if things could be funded’. ‘My hope would be that as it would appear now, as is the case in Scotland, to learn a musical instrument for free’, although questions the sustainability of such a scheme. ‘The English scene is still far far too fragmented’. Organisations are not joined up, whereas in Scotland, ‘everyone seems to be on the same page’, and ‘they might have that in Wales for the new curriculum’, where there is talk of a single music service for Wales. Tim advocates for the expansion of music services with quality training for staff. ‘Forget progression to the National Youth Orchestras’ – the statistics show that the system favours the independent sector anyway. Tim believes that the workforce expertise of music service staff could be used at school level. The discipline area could build esteem for music with a well-resourced, adaptable workforce; ‘that would transform music in schools’. ‘Without a decent workforce, that’s well qualified, motivated, we won’t get anywhere, and we’ll be saying exactly the same thing in ten years’ time’, like what was said in 2004, 2005, in the Music Manifesto. ‘We’re all talking about [the demise of music education], but nobody’s doing anything about it’. The discipline area requires investment. ‘Don’t leave it to chance, make [an arts subject] statutory [until end of Key Stage Four]’ – after all, the music industry is worth a billion. Tim believes that allowing children to leave school without fundamental musical skills and knowledge is akin to allowing children out of school without knowing their times tables. He jokes that ‘you can classify the state of the musical nation by assessing the quality of singing happy birthday’. Students should be able to sing in tune before they leave school.

Tim doesn’t think his hopes will materialise ‘because [music] won’t be statutory’. Tim fears for the second NPME; he fears it will divert more funding to vulnerable communities, whereas it needs to be more universal instead. Unless you get rid of the EBacc, Progress Eight, musical instrumental tuition fees, unless you have high quality music teaching in schools and music department practice rooms for breakout, the situation is unlikely to change. ‘Nothing has changed over the past 100 years’ – we’re in the same position now, so there is no hope for future of music education. ‘What’s the point? Why bother [investing in research and the National Curriculum if nothing will change? … At the end of the day, overarching education policy gets in the way’.