Is Music in the Curriculum Facing Extinction?
Mapping music education provision in English secondary schools 2012-2016/17

England has a National Curriculum for Music Education (DfE, 2013) and a National Plan for Music Education (DfE, 2011). Seemingly, then, a high degree of importance is placed upon music education by the current and previous government; indeed, the former Mayor of London, on launching the London Music Pledge, stated:

“Music isn’t a “nice-to-have”, it’s an essential part of every child’s education. From the ages of 5 to 14, all children are entitled to play instruments, compose and listen to music in school, every week. The fact that the National Curriculum guarantees children ten years of unbroken musical learning in our schools is something to be enormously proud of.” (Boris Johnson, 2014).

This presentation considers the reality of this situation in relation to musical learning in English secondary schools. It explores the findings of a recent study in secondary music education. Based on over 700 questionnaire responses from secondary schools in England, it considers a longitudinal view of music education across the period 2012-2016/17. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, factors impacting children’s music education within and beyond the classroom are considered. In particular, it considers the impact of school type and Ofsted grading on the level of provision over the five-year period, as well as potential pressures, such as accountability measures and the structure of the school day.

The results of this study demonstrate patchy and variable access to regular music education in a secondary school system that is becoming increasingly more fragmented.

Following the presentation, a panel - chaired by William Deighan (head teacher at Varndean School) and representing a cross section of interests and views from different stakeholders - will discuss the implications for the future.