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29 January 2016

Department for Education  
Great Smith Street  
London SW1P 3BT

Dear colleagues

**Re: Consultation on Implementing the English Baccalaureate**

I write on behalf of the National Association for Music in Higher Education (NAMHE) in response to the above-named consultation. NAMHE is the HE subject association for Music, representing the UK community of university music departments and conservatoires.

Your questions for consultation ask about the precise detail of the implementation of this attainment measure. However, our concerns relate not to such details, but to a much wider issue surrounding the design of this measure, and the deleterious effects that its promotion may have on Music in our schools. We note that we have not previously been given an opportunity to comment on these factors, and that many inside and outside the profession remain unaware of the existence of this consultation document. This is why we are responding not to the questions set, but instead discursively.

As currently proposed, the EBacc combines magnitude (7 or 8 GCSEs) with a very high level of subject specificity. If the measure is adopted universally in England, most pupils will be able to take only one or two GCSEs in non-EBacc subjects (such as Music). Some pupils will take no additional subjects, while others will be strongly encouraged to choose additional EBacc subjects (e.g. a pupil taking History may have good reason to take Geography too, but this combination carries the added incentive, from the school's perspective, of creating an extra opportunity to score highly against EBacc measures). Despite the statistical evidence discussed below, this will have a detrimental effect on the take-up of individual artistic and creative subjects, such as Music, which are not included within the EBacc measure. Initially, that effect is perceptual (in that the preclusion of these subjects within the measure suggests that they are not valued), but this will quickly have very real repercussions on the quality and availability of musical education in our schools. An additional factor is that creative arts subjects like music tend to be more expensive to deliver in schools, so are all the more susceptible to being cut when times are hard and budgets tight.

Both the perceptual and the real effects of excluding Music from the EBacc may be predicted by looking at the correlation between the 2012 introduction of the 'AAB in

facilitating subjects' attainment measure at A Level (subsequently amended in 2014) and the fall in take-up rates for A Level Music (down from 9495 in 2012 to 7776 in 2015). As a result of this decline, Music A Level is no longer considered financially viable in many schools and FE colleges, and there are geographical lacunae in its availability. This situation has resulted at least in part from a perception among schools and parents that employers and HE providers value Music A Level less highly than A Levels in 'facilitating subjects' (a view decidedly not shared by HE institutions, as the Russell Group has made clear in its [response](#) to the 16-19 Accountability Consultation). We contend that the EBacc's prioritisation of some subjects over others will have the same effect on public perception of the value of Music and other creative subjects at GCSE.

We acknowledge that take-up of 'at least one' arts subject at GCSE has increased slightly since the introduction of the EBacc (as indicated by the statistics set out in the final paragraph of page 18 of the consultation document). However, it may be deduced from the statistics that the vast majority of these pupils take only a single arts subject. It is necessary for the viability of GCSE Music and Music Technology in schools that pupils are not obliged to choose just one from a menu of arts subjects. Creative students should be enabled and encouraged to study more than one arts subject, and the EBacc measure should facilitate this.

The value of music education in our schools is [proven](#). It is uniquely valuable both as a creative discipline in its own right and as a subject which develops key transferable skills valued by HE institutions and employers (e.g. emotional intelligence, problem-solving in complex environments, manual dexterity, collaborative working, effective communication and presentation skills). Moreover, creative subjects such as music encourage the creative thinking that is necessary for genuine excellence in STEM areas. Beyond the basics, there is not always one right answer – not even *a* right answer, in some instances – and only first-hand experience with areas where that is a fundamental precept (as in creative subjects) will prepare today's Year 9s for a world we can't even imagine yet.

These factors are embedded in the Music GCSE, to the recent reform of which NAMHE was pleased to contribute. Given the level of voluntary and Government-funded investment in youth music, coupled with the immense [economic value](#) of the creative industries in the UK – currently 6% of the GDP and employing over 2 million people – the devaluation of Music as a GCSE subject in England through the design of the EBacc attainment measure makes little financial sense.

There are elements of this proposal that we welcome. We fully agree that every child and young person should be offered a rich academic curriculum, and we welcome the inclusion of the specified subject areas – English, maths, science, humanities and modern foreign languages – in that curriculum. However, we strongly believe that the EBacc attainment measure, as currently defined, devalues the study of artistic and creative subjects at GCSE, and will very quickly result in a reduction in the availability of GCSE Music, with extremely detrimental repercussions for higher education, for the UK economy, and for the health and well-being of future generations.

We would therefore urge you to consider either scaling back the EBacc attainment measure to allow pupils more choice at GCSE level, or expressly including creative and artistic subjects within the measure.

NAMHE would be delighted to contribute to any further discussions of this agenda over the next few months.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Collins". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of "Chris" and "Collins" being capitalized and prominent.

Dr Chris Collins  
Vice-Chair, National Association for Music in Higher Education

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