**Dare we hope?**

Last week I wrote ‘Together we CAN make a difference’ following my attendance at the Westminster Education Forum. I have just spent three very special days at Future Play: Music Systems in the 21st Century, presented by the Barbican Centre and LA Phil during their Barbican International Associate Residency with Gustavo Dudamel.

With members from Youth Orchestra Los Angeles and Heart of Los Angeles presenting as well as a keynote from the inspirational Richard Holloway of Sistema Scotland it is not surprising that references to El Sistema were never far away – indeed, I was attending myself as one of the Directors/Trustees of In Harmony ∙ Sistema England. The openness, generosity of spirit and preparedness of people to give as much time as it takes to young people and to each other that is so much a trademark of El Sistema was evident for all to see with delegates from as far afield as Israel, Germany and Holland as well as the USA.

I can’t begin to do justice to the content of three days of thought provoking presentations and discussions but I was asked to sum up at the end so here, for a wider audience, are what I felt to be some of the key messages that I came away with.

**There is more that unites than divides us.** Dare we hope that we can build on our common agendas and put our differences behind us – or at least celebrate those differences in a constructive way?

**We are all care about sharing with and passing on our passion for music to young people.** Dare we hope that the more we work in collaboration and partnership with others, particularly through the new music education hubs, the more, between us we can reach all young people?

**There is a rich and diverse range of musical pathways that young people may wish to follow.** None of us can provide all of those opportunities alone. Dare we hope that working in genuine partnership we can provide so much more than the sum of our individual parts? Can we find the highest common factor rather than dumbing down to the lowest common denominator?

**Creativity at the core.**  This includes young people’s own creativity and re-creativity. Dare we hope that we can also be creative enough to find ways of collaborating and providing young people with a coherent whole, rather than competing with each other to the potential detriment of young people?

**Managing expectations.** The National Plan for Music Education is a vision for 2020. Yes, we do need to demonstrate effective change quickly. And yes, the Plan was published in November 2011. But it has only really been implemented for 6 months. Effective change takes time and often requires delicate negotiations behind the scenes. Just because everything is not perfect doesn’t mean the process of change for the better is not happening. We shouldn’t be knocking the Plan or its implementation without giving it time to bear fruit. Let’s give it a chance and take stock of progress in July 2014. By then ACE will have a view about progress and can look at alternatives. I am convinced the vast majority of hubs will be able to demonstrate success and those that can’t don’t deserve continuing funding anyway. That will still give time for alternatives to be considered for March 2015. Dare we hope that we can be given time to make the Plan work? I don’t believe there is an alternative that has any chance of working better.

**Young people at the centre.**

By keeping young people firmly at the centre of our thinking and actions we CAN find a successful way forward together. Together we CAN make a difference. Dare we hope that with the Westminster Education Forum last week; the Education Expo next week; the learning from El Sistema and our own National Plan beginning to bed down, this three week period might just be the point in time when things begin to change noticeably and in a sustainable way for the better? Whether it does or not will depend on the decisions each and every one of us makes as we go back to our ‘day jobs’. Can we hang on to and be part of the bigger vision as well as dealing with the day to day challenges?