

performance on English and Maths SATs, even when the children have had less time studying these core subjects due to increased time spent on music education. She suggests that music can improve mood, wellbeing and measures such as attention and concentration and that these benefits occur across the whole lifespan.

All speakers were emphatic that music education is critical and that the benefits transfer across the entire curriculum and beyond education. The discussion that followed included debate on the best type of music to start with, accessibility of music to those of lower socioeconomic status and whether group or individual

lessons were optimal. Although a number of factors were considered, the general consensus was that beginning with the voice through singing was a sensible choice and that group training was useful, although individual lessons may be necessary as well to achieve particular levels of proficiency. It was clear that music should not

be taken for granted and that as education changes, losing sight of music would be a mistake that impacts on development beyond the curriculum.

TIME FOR ACTION ON E-WASTE



Dr Keith Baker
Sustainable Urban
Environments Research Group
Centre for Energy and the Built
Environment
School of the Built and Natural
Environment
Glasgow Caledonian University

In August 2008 the New York Times described e-waste as “the world’s fastest growing and potentially most dangerous waste problem”. Yet despite continued criticism over its poor record on tackling the problem the UK Government has been slow to respond to the urgent need to stem the illegal exports of waste electronic equipment to the developing world.

The UK is currently responsible for illegally exporting around 23,000 tonnes of computers alone to Africa each year, the problem has yet to rise far enough up the political agenda to merit serious attention. This means that the UK remains in violation of the Basel Convention, and it is now in violation of a 2009 amendment to the European Waste Shipment Regulation, which effectively brought the Basle Convention into law.

A high profile investigation by the Independent, Sky News and Greenpeace in 2009, highlighted how the public sector remains a source of e-waste that evades customs by being labelled for 're-use' by tagging a TV disposed of at a municipal waste facility in Hampshire and tracking it to Africa. Whilst several recent prosecutions by the Environment Agency have begun to raise the profile of the issue, these merely represent the tip of the iceberg. Both the EA and its Scottish equivalent SEPA provide registers of approved recyclers and exporters but, as is the case with the stretched resources of environmental lobby groups, the sheer scale of the problem and its lack of visibility demonstrate the need for a dedicated

organisation. Furthermore, as cowboy operations can undercut the costs of responsible recyclers this lack of support is also hindering the growth of the UK’s e-waste recycling industry. Yet given the current economic climate the case for making the relatively small investment that would be needed to provide a significant boost to a mature and profitable industry can be made on economic grounds alone.

In the US, the Basel Action Network administers the e-Stewards initiative (see www.e-stewards.org) and is now expanding it overseas. E-Stewards is a third-party audited accreditation programme that provides certification for responsible recyclers that ensure that no e-waste is dumped in landfills or incinerators, exported to developing countries or sent to prison labour operations, and ensure no release of private data from waste devices. E-Stewards was so popular with industry that it was over-subscribed even in its pilot year. BAN has been able to make this progress due to the backing of leading recyclers in North America, and because it is able to focus solely on tackling the problem.

In response to these needs in Sept 2009 the Photonics and Plastic Electronics and Resource Efficiency Network Knowledge Transfer Networks backed and published my call for a new independent, industry-led organisation to provide the following:

- Easily accessible and informed advice on e-waste
- Awareness-raising through targeted advice to the public and private sectors, and to consumers
- A platform for lobbying to end the UK’s illegal exports of e-waste
- An independent, industry-backed registration system for responsible recyclers, based on e-Stewards

Since then little has changed and the call remains a live document. However, given the continued economic downturn and the significant potential for growth in the UK’s e-waste recycling industry, let alone the environmental benefits this would bring, there are now more reasons than ever for the UK Government to support this call.