Hello, I'm Stefano Pozzi, and I'm Assistant Director at the Department for Education, responsible for music education policy.

And I'm Hannah Fouracre, the Director of Music Education at Arts Council England.

We're here to update you on the Music Hub Investment Programme and share what we've learned from the recent sector consultation.

But first, we want to thank you for sharing your feedback through the survey and the focus groups in January, as well as to acknowledge all of those who have contacted the Arts Council and the DfE with their thoughts. We are thinking about how to approach a change that is is challenging, but one which will lead to better music education for children and young people.

We really appreciate and have listened to all of your thorough and constructive feedback, so thank you again.

Stefano. Let's start by discussing why we did a sector consultation.

Well, this all started with our call for evidence to inform the refresh of the National Plan for Music Education, which asked experts and parents and teachers and children and young people what they think about music education. They identify that music education provision is patchy throughout the country. The National Plan aims to address that partly through the Music Hubs working more strategically across wider areas. The Department for Education proposed some guiding principle for how to achieve that vision.

We know the importance of learning from the knowledge and experience of people who work with and four children and young people, which is why we asked the Arts Council to consult with the sector on these guiding principles.

Yes. And first my team carried out internal focus groups with Arts Council colleagues across the country, drawing on their experience and knowledge of the sector and relationships on a local and national scale. Their feedback helped to shape the external phase of consultation, which we commissioned independent researchers Melissa Wong and Dougie Lonie to develop and lead, and that included an open to all survey, five focus groups across the country and a digital focus group.

I was part of every focus group and Stefano and members of his team attended every in person group as well.

And Hannah, how many people took part in the survey and the focus groups?

We had 286 responses to our survey and our focus groups were attended by 139 people. We heard from a huge range of organisations, including current Hub Lead Organisations, a variety of education settings such as schools, music, cultural, youth and community organizations, as well as freelancers. On our website we've published a breakdown of the types of organisations that took part and their current involvement with Hubs.

And what did you ask them to consider?

We asked for feedback on some guiding principles and three possible ways of creating new Music Hub geographies based on the principles which can be summarised as a regional structure, sub regional or a more locally nuanced structure.

There wasn't a clear preferred approach and there was quite a difference of opinion depending on respondents' current involvement with Hubs and the parts of the country that they were based in. Current Hub Lead Organisations, for example, were on average more likely to prefer the method that would result in the largest number of new Music Hub areas. But organisations that currently aren't engaged with Hubs at all preferred the regional structure with the fewest number of Music Hubs.

And how did you evaluate the findings when there such differences of opinion?

Well, we didn't just evaluate the numbers. We also looked very closely at why people liked and disliked each option and what they thought the implications of each option might be.

What we learned was incredibly valuable, helping us to identify a number of really important themes and ideas. First of all, there was a consistent interest in and support for change, and people recognise that more strategic collaboration across larger geographies could be beneficial for children and young people. But we also understood that there needs to be more clarity about why a structural change will better support the experience and outcomes for children and young people.

It was clear that the way that structural changes is delivered really matters, that it takes time, expertise and capacity to achieve effectively and sustainably.

We heard that what is meant by consistency needs to be explained more clearly and that the specific role of the new Hub Lead Organisations should be outlined as a priority.

Respondents said that the new structure should seek to respond to local contexts, existing alliances and ways of working, and build on positive and impactful sector development.

They also noted that some Hubs covering single local authority areas may be appropriate based on the needs and the lives of children and young people in those places.

Respondents identified lots of opportunities and potential for new ways of working together and for greater consistency across the Hub area. For example, there could be more consistent performance management, monitoring and evaluation, better access to training and networking for the music education workforce, and be positive for fundraising and income generation.

But of course, challenges were identified too. We've listened to concerns around how the sector will move into a new structure and how a change might impact organisations and their teams.

Respondents' overall thoughts were clear. The number of Hubs is less important than the appropriateness and the quality of the new geographies and how they will respond to the needs of children and young people, and we agree.

And what have you done so far with the findings of the consultation, Hannah?

Well, we've listened and reflected carefully on the feedback and discussed everything that we learned with our Area and National Councils and our Executive Board before sharing our findings and some potential ways forward with the DfE.

What's DfE now doing with the learnings from the sector consultation, Stefano?

Just like you, the DfE music education policy team have carefully reflected on what the sector have said, and Arts Council England and the Department have updated our rationale. And we will continue to work with Arts Council England, with yourselves, on the Investment Program, taking all the feedback into account to inform the next steps for the Music Hubs programme.

We hope that the information that we've published today helps you to understand the next stages of the programme, but, as always, if you have a question or feedback, please do get in touch. Thank you again for all of your feedback so far and we will continue to work with you throughout the Investment Programme.

And thank you for your time in watching this today.