

**Submission
No 133**

**INQUIRY INTO THE MUSIC AND ARTS ECONOMY IN
NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Upper Hunter Conservatorium of Music

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Upper Hunter
Conservatorium
of Music

Music and Arts Economy in New South Wales

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Authorised: UHCM Committee President

Introduction

Upper Hunter Conservatorium of Music is one of 17 Regional Conservatoriums around NSW that provide music education and performance opportunities to communities across the State. The network of Regional Conservatoriums, partially funded by the Department of Education, currently has approximately 25,000 students engaged in some form of music education, ranging from instrumental and vocal tuition to classroom music education programs in schools. This network is represented through the Association of NSW Regional Conservatoriums (ANSWRC).

With our main premises located in Muswellbrook, Upper Hunter Conservatorium of Music services approximately 900 students, with lessons held from Murrurundi in the north, to Broke in the south, and Merriwa in the west. Students in areas such as Tamworth, Penrith and New Zealand access tuition via video conferencing.

While the majority of our clientele is school-aged students, we also teach adults, pre-schoolers and people with a disability, and run a variety of ensembles including choirs, orchestra, concert bands, string ensembles, saxophone ensemble, and guitar ensembles. We present a series of Visiting Artist concerts throughout the year, with a range of professional musicians performing diverse styles of music for our community.

Key Issues

As a regional facility, there are several issues that impact and limit our effectiveness in meeting our aims, which are:

- to provide quality music and drama tuition to residents of the Upper Hunter;
- to foster music as a form of social interaction, expression and creativity; and
- to enhance the cultural life of the local community.

An issue of great significance is the difficulty of attracting qualified music teachers to a regional area, where they experience limited opportunities for local performing or professional development. This results in current teaching staff being overworked, and necessitates teaching in unfamiliar genres, or in the inability to meet the needs of students.

Similarly, although the Regional Conservatoriums are partially funded by the Department of Education, as not-for-profit organisations dependent on student fees for livelihood, we are unable to offer competitive salary packages for teachers with appropriate qualifications in music education. Likewise, in a state and country with teacher accreditation laws, the hours and days worked by regional conservatorium teachers

in schools are not recognised by the Department of Education, again making teaching positions less appealing for qualified teachers.

Although we aim to offer music education and performances for all ages and strata of the community, we rely on fee-paying students to exist. There are needs and interests in the community that our organisation could readily fulfil, for example, music in early childhood centres, assistance with classroom music in schools, music for people with disabilities, music in correction centres and music for seniors. However, many of these groups are unable to cover the cost of our teachers and resources without some form of subsidy.

Case Studies

At the end of the 2017 school year, four of our twenty teachers left UHCM to relocate, or for other, more secure employment.

One of these teachers, a young man with an undergraduate degree in music in his third year of teaching, was excited to be working in a regional area, and looking forward to entering an affordable property market. However, as an early career teacher, he was fearful of the consequences of being away from the Department of Education system, where his teaching hours/days did not count as service, and where his salary would not rise incrementally.

We have yet to find a replacement for one of our teachers, despite three rounds of advertising. The position is not full time, and there is little likelihood of the hours increasing over the short term. Teachers are not prepared to move to the area for casual/ short term hours per week. It is too far to drive for a day's work from another centre.

We are currently investigating ways that we might bring music programs to St Helliers Correctional Centre and several retirement complexes in the area. While the communities of these centres are unable to pay fees for classes, Upper Hunter Conservatorium of Music is not in a financial position to donate the time of teachers or resources.

Recommendations

Although we are partially funded by the Department of Education, our teachers do not work under an award, and are not eligible for the same salaries or conditions as their counterparts employed directly by the Department.

An equitable system, recognizing both qualification and service would raise both interest in regional positions, and the standard of teaching.

Funding specifically for low-SES or disadvantaged regional community music education via the Regional Conservatorium Grant program would enable service of all community groups and members.