

**Submission
No 16**

**INQUIRY INTO ARTS AND MUSIC EDUCATION AND
TRAINING IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Name: Mr Christopher Aschman

Date Received: 24 July 2024

To the Honourable members of the Joint Select Committee on Arts and Music Education and Training in New South Wales,

I am writing this submission as an individual who has studied and worked in NSW as a music educator and professional musician since 1996. I received a Bachelor of Music Performance at the Canberra School of Music (now ANU School of Music) in 1996. I have a Graduate Diploma in Education from Charles Sturt University (2004).

Prior to this tertiary study, I was a professional musician, and served in the Royal Australian Navy Reserve Band Tasmania, with experience of touring with the Royal Australian Navy Fleet Band (now Sydney) and the Victorian Naval Band (now Melbourne). I have enjoyed a full musical career of performing in all forms of Community, Art Music and Popular Music.

I was the Bass Trombonist of the Canberra Symphony Orchestra from 1994 – 1998. I was employed as Director of School Bands and Head of Brass at The Riverina Conservatorium of Music (regional) from 1997 – 2004.

I am a Bass Trombonist, Instrumental Brass Teacher and experienced Conductor of School Music Ensembles, and Classroom Teacher. In my other roles as an educator, I have been a Head of Department, and I am a Senior Pastoral Carer in my current employment at Trinity Grammar School, Sydney where I have been Bandmaster for the last 19 ½ years.

My submission will take a personal narrative of my educational experience in Music Education in NSW, and the lack of equity in student participation in music programs in New South Wales historically.

I was born in 1972 in Hobart, Tasmania and my earliest experience of music making was in my public primary school, with Choirs and Guitar instructions by a qualified primary music teacher. In 1982 I started High School in a lower socio-economic high area school that had a music instrumental program. I was given a Trombone for free and undertook lessons at school with qualified teachers who were employed through the Education Department Tasmania. My lessons were free. I was part of an instrumental and band program that was replicated throughout the Southern Tasmania Region and funded publicly.

I would not be in my current circumstances without this publicly funded support. I am grateful beyond measure. Music and education are my life's work.

When I began teaching at the Riverina Conservatorium, Wagga Wagga, in 1997 I was the only Brass Teacher in this region. I was one of a handful of qualified instrumental conductors. I would regularly teach students who would travel up to 2 hours one way to make an afternoon or weekend lesson from other centres in the region and as far as Griffith. **The commitment from these students and families to give their children music experiences and training cannot be understated.**

My main School Bands in the Riverina based in Wagga Wagga were the Koorinal Public School Band, and the Mt Erin Girls High School bands (Catholic). At the time these were the two main functional existing school groups in Wagga Wagga. I would like to focus on the Koorinal Public School Band, which is still running to this day as an example of determination by a School P&C with support of the principal to give students in this area the 'extra-Curricular' opportunities that other socio-economic areas in NSW hold for granted.

Each year, in early June the Koorinal Public School Bands would travel to the Yamaha Music Festival in Chatswood. This trip was funded by parents, with billeting arrangements for students generally with Lindfield Primary School, who Koorinal Public had established a relationship with. The students would perform out of section as we could only be available to be in Sydney on a weekend, but the band always made a great musical and social impression to whoever saw them perform.

The reason I highlight this experience, is this: **The Koorinal Public School Band at the time was the only (as far as known) public primary school band program West of the Dividing Range, and definitely in the Riverina Region.**

The funding, all parent, driven, and I was remunerated through an arrangement for \$150 per week. This involved 3 x 1 1/2 hr rehearsals plus whatever concerts were planned. I was employed through the Riverina Conservatorium as a full time casual, with no personal, holiday, or long service leave arrangements at the time.

Snapshot over 25 years later, what has really changed in NSW Music Education?

Unlike other states such as Queensland or Victoria, there is still no formal state-wide instrumental program in Schools. The Arts Unit is the tip of the iceberg, what lies beneath? Education Department Music teachers throughout the state go the extra mile to provide students in public schools with instrumental lessons and ensembles.

I left the Regional Conservatorium System in 2005, to be employed in an Independent School. This was/and is my first job as a musician and educator that I have been afforded a full-time loading, and the benefits of full-time employment and protections, under an award.

Many Instrumental Music teachers throughout NSW are employed privately, as self-employed businesses, or generally as peripatetic casual or part time teachers.

Is this an attractive lifestyle choice with the cost of living, and life choices that people must make? Would anyone sitting on this committee make this choice of career?

What does that say for the value of music educational and instrumental teachers work in our education system?

One of the big stumbling blocks I see in the delivery of equitable music opportunities for students in NSW is the funding to establish a more expansive and equitable arts unit, and the staffing it with qualified trained music instrumental staff that can reach not only regional areas but schools with lower socio-economic bases.

Another stumbling block:

The justification for music is always under scrutiny for its value and impact.

The research and work of advocates such as Dr. Anita Collins, the Alberts / Tony Foundation Music Education: Right from the Start Initiative can highlight the many benefits of music making in Children and Students. I will not go into this at length as I know that there will be detailed submissions regarding these benefits.

My personal question to members of this committee as you research, listen, deliberate, and explore the submissions presented to you for this inquiry.

Have you yourself had instrumental music training or experience in ensembles?

If so, what did it do for you personally?

If not, would you like to find out?

My fear is that with the huge generational history of lack of quality instrumental Music Education throughout NSW there are not enough people in positions of influence or power like yourselves, who have had the transformational experience of playing a musical Instrument.

As an example: I would believe at school members of the committee have all generally played a form of organised sport and understand through experience inherently the benefits of this activity. But have you played music to the same extent?

My offer to the committee is simple. I will provide any member of the committee who wishes to learn or experience making music on a brass instrument free lessons to show you personally what music making can truly be as an experience for the participant. I'm sure we can find an instrument, and I will make the time.

Good luck with all your work in this enquiry, I truly believe this could be the watershed moment in Arts and Music Education in NSW.

I am available if any further correspondence is desired.

Your Sincerely,

Chris Aschman