

**Submission  
No 17**

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

**Organisation:** Central Coast Conservatorium of Music

**Date Received:** 24 July 2024

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**Submission to:**  
**Joint Select Committee on Arts and Music Education and Training in NSW**

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The Central Coast Conservatorium of Music has operated in the Central Coast Region for over 40 years. We occupy the oldest building in the Gosford CBD, being the old courthouse and police station built in 1848. We are an integral part of the region and are part of the Association of NSW Regional Conservatoriums, being partly funded by the NSW Department of Education to provide music education into over 20 local schools that would otherwise have no music programs.

We currently employ over 50 qualified music teachers who teach percussion, strings, brass, woodwind, piano and voice. We have ensembles including choirs, primary wind ensemble, symphonic wind ensemble, youth orchestra and chamber groups. We partner with other community groups to provide community concerts. These partners include local rotary clubs, Central Coast Concert Band, Central Coast Opera, Central Coast Philharmonia Choir and Symphony Central Coast. We provide the conductor for the NSW Regional Youth Orchestra.

As a regional conservatorium we teach into over 20 local schools, in which over 650 students are part of our training and concert bands. These bands allow students to practice in small groups as well as a band, and results in performance opportunities to parents and friends of the schools, creating social inclusion and wellbeing for both performers and audience members.

The challenge we have going forward is maintaining and recruiting suitably qualified music teachers. It would appear that there is a decline in music education at both the primary and secondary levels in schools, due to a decline in teaching music at the tertiary level. Graduates do not have the appropriate qualifications for teaching of music into schools. We are concerned about the decline in number of qualified music teachers and the decline in the next generation of teachers of music, who although have a teaching qualification, the music curriculum appears to be small and at times none at all at the school level.

The research is clear that music education particularly for young students in primary school assists them to gain confidence, provides social skills when performing in bands, increases their overall academic performance and assists in wellbeing, as music should be “fun”! We are however finding that there is a lack of suitably qualified teachers, who have the ability to teach music at the primary school level. Whilst some schools use local conservatorium teachers to supplement this learning, some schools are absorbing music into other programs such as creative arts, or as an extracurricular activity. We are also finding a lack of support for music programs from School Principals, mainly due to financial constraints within the schools. We note the recent decrease in funding of public schools in NSW.

There appears to be a lack of regulation for the delivery of music in the education sector. There is also a lack of policy in the delivery of music into schools. There is also a lack of training for studio teachers who teach one on one lessons with students as well as small groups. An accreditation program for studio teaching would assist in creating consistency in delivery of studio teaching.

As a regional conservatorium we face the constant challenge of recruitment of suitable qualified teachers, there is a distinct lack of supply. We are also challenged as we are located between Newcastle and Sydney, who have the ability to pay higher hourly rates to attract teachers. Our biggest competition are the “garage teachers”, who charge a lower hourly rate, but at times are not qualified and can in fact risk the student being taught incorrectly in their instrument. Recent increases in NSW teachers wages has also further constrained supply of teachers for regional conservatoriums.

For us at the Central Coast Conservatorium of Music, funding is a huge challenge for us. The NSW Department of Education are constantly looking for growth particularly into the schools bands programs, however our funding is limited to CPI growth only, and has in fact not been reviewed in over 10 years. Although parents pay a reduced rate for their students taking music at school, current economic conditions has shown retention of students to be a challenge as music is seen as extracurricular, and less funds available for schools and conservatoriums puts pressure on schools and parents to buy in to services provided by Central Coast Conservatorium of Music. The result is that in the future music will only be available to those with high disposable incomes, with many students potentially missing out due to economic affordability, this results in a lack of equity and fairness in the offering of music to all students.

We currently occupy a heritage listed 176-year-old building, which is not fit for purpose. We inherited the building and are constantly challenged by the expenses of repairing and maintaining it. Being that it is not fit for purpose, we also suffer challenges such as sound bleed, and spend much time attempting to soundproof rooms for music teaching. We also occupy a Central Coast Council owned house, which is old, potentially run down, but it is affordable. The challenge is that we have a lack of tenure (only last year we were given 4 weeks to vacate the premises we occupied for 40 years as potentially TAFE was taking over, however the funding fell through).

As a regional conservatorium in NSW, we welcome a review into Arts and Music Education and training in NSW. The research is clear regarding the benefits of music education, however we believe music should be further embedded at both the primary and high school levels, taught by suitably qualified music teachers. This would require a strategy to include music further in NSW curriculum, not just a policy by the government in power at the time. As a regional conservatorium we can play our part in training and education, if additional resources and investment by government are given, this would be part of the reinvigoration of music in regional schools and communities.

Dr Lisa Barnes (CEO)

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