

**Submission
No 86**

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

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**Submission to Joint Select Committee On Arts and Music
Education and Training**

**Inquiry into arts and music education and training in New
South Wales**

Submission by
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Introduction: My reference point.

I come to this submission with a unique set of experiences in music education, diverse professional appointments, distinctive professional arts practice, informing specific and informative illuminations advanced over the previous five decades.

Currently, I am the Director, a Head of Agency, for the Upper Hunter Conservatorium of Music. Previously, I was Head Teacher of Music at Orange TAFE with delivery to a geographic ambitus from Lithgow to Broken Hill, delivering TVET and full time courses from Certificate II to Advanced Diploma. I have other diverse educational and performance positions from the North Coast to the Central West and metropolitan Sydney. Within many diverse arts management roles I was Orchestral Manager for the Sydney Youth Orchestra. I have been an active musician in a diverse range of idioms for 50 years.

Although Sydney born and raised, the vast majority of my career has been in researching, developing and delivering diverse arts education and musical experiences in the regions of New South Wales. My experience and comments are deeply informed by the regional experience of the communities I have serviced.

I am overwhelmingly enthused by this inquiry and the chance to represent the arts education experiences of the communities I continue to serve and represent.

My observations are experiential with small data analysis as quantitative support.

I hope that real insight, illumination and inquiry informs a deliverable path to significant improvements in arts education in New South Wales and present some of my brief reactions to specific terms of reference proffered.

Responses to the inquiry terms of reference

(b) the quality and effectiveness of music education and training, including:

- (i) progress towards a long-term goal of quality music education, including actions to address identified barriers**
- (ii) the present level and status of formal music education across all levels, including primary, secondary, and tertiary levels**

There are many examples of the faltering progress in arts and creative industries education in formal and informal settings.

I suggest the long diminution of music enrolments in the Higher School Certificate are emblematic of many factors influencing the reduction of student interest and enrolment in creative arts in general, and music in particular.

At the secondary level a student's experience, and hence engagement of all arts is influenced by the extraordinary diversity in quality and quantity of the arts education experience in our schools. Primary level music education varies enormously due to system choices, teacher and principal commitment, time, materials and budget restrictions and significantly the commitment of the community. There are some great examples of the power of arts education to transform student engagement, motivation and academic achievement, proof practical of the endless research and clinical findings published over several generations of the benefits of arts education, particularly music education. Very few of the primary teachers and principals I interact with express confidence with their music skills and delivery of a quality music program.

Quality and readiness of tertiary graduates entering our industry is inconsistent. As a regional conservatorium, we struggle with recruiting employment ready graduates in vocal and instrumental teaching. Graduates of music courses are equipped with a range of generally well developed performance, compositional and musicology skills but with limited or non-existent studio and small group instrumental and vocal teaching skills or experiences essential to success in our sector. Tertiary studies in

conducting can equip some of these students with specific ensemble directions skills and abilities, but invariably little experience of skills in leadership of primary or secondary student ensembles. Convincing graduates to move to small regional centres is difficult when our salaries are uncompetitive, career development and progression inconsistent, and the general lack of community services taken for granted in the capital. Adjustment to some of the difficulties of regional life can be difficult.

The arts and music education industry is plagued with inequality of access to education and experiences, particularly on economic access and geography.

My previous experience as Orchestral Manager for the Sydney Youth Orchestra confirms the extraordinary personal and familial commitment of our talented youth to achieve at the highest level in an art form. It also underlined the inequality facing many in musical education. The talented performers in the SYO organisation were only there because of the financial ability of the families to support the aspirations of their young. Not only cost of individual tuition, professional level instruments but also the extensive experiences necessary to develop outstanding young performers of traditional orchestral music.

(iv) the role of regional conservatoriums and creative professionals in music education

New South Wales is the only jurisdiction in Australia with a Regional Conservatorium model of quality music education and music experiences for the citizens living outside the capitals. Approximately 3.5 million residents live outside of our capital. The model has merit in extension to other states and territories.

(x) factors influencing student decisions to pursue further music education, including but not limited to course choice, course location and the method of study

Students contemplating a career as a secondary music teacher face a challenging decision. Along with the increased workload of the modern teacher, professional frustrations with delivery, lack of appropriate physical spaces and systemic restrictions, horror stories of student behaviour are impediments for secondary students pursuing tertiary arts education. With the ongoing difficulties and challenges for practitioners of secondary teaching, I find it difficult to recommend secondary music teaching to interested students as a fulfilling, rewarding and long-term career, incurring a significant student debt for a career that sometimes is shockingly short.

(xi) notable approaches to music education in other jurisdictions

I suggest some notable approaches to arts and creative industries are in our history as much as other examining other jurisdictions.

My direct experience in the TAFE arts sector demonstrates a committed and well-resourced post school alternative to university music education, particularly in the regions. Over 20 years TAFE music programs in the Central West flourished and had consistent enrolment demand, quality student graduates performing at regional national and international level in all aspect of the industry from performance, composition, music business, technical production and music education. There is a small army of ex-TAFE graduates with established careers particularly at Regional Conservatoria. That stream of motivated and well experience musicians is now severely curtailed.

The contestable funding model and private provider preference of the early years of this century eradicated the affordable post school music and arts education offered by NSW TAFE. The private sector has not filled this demand.

(x) Measures of success in music education

We are regularly measured for delivery success in the Regional Conservatorium sector by our triennial agreement with the Department of Education containing a number of Key Performance Measures (KPM) and Equivalent Teaching Hours (ETH) to measure some of the areas of success in our service. While these measures are useful they are incomplete, need review and extension to capture not only quantity but qualitative measurement of success.

In the unregulated low cost tutor market I have witnessed diverse delivery and service standards. I have experienced many disappointed students and parents who present to the conservatorium with below standard experiences with the unregulated tutor sector. This in no way besmirches the work of some of my colleagues in this sector who deliver a quality product, but currently there are no mechanisms to ensure quality in this sector. I have experienced many low cost providers without even the most basic business necessities of public liability of even a Working with Children clearance.

In closing, I encourage the joint committee in its investigation, research and report delivery into a vital sector of the education domain and look forward to any further illumination of clarification the committee may seek from myself.

Andrew French-Northam
Muswellbrook July 2024