

**Submission
No 102**

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

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Dear Ms Finn

Re: Response to the Joint Select Committee Inquiry in arts and music education and training in New South Wales

Background and introduction

I am Associate Professor of Education in the Faculty of Art, Design & Architecture, School of Education, UNSW Sydney. My research expertise is in curriculum and assessment, as well as mapping students learning and development in Visual Arts. I also research in areas of curriculum and assessment. I have a long history in leading and advising on Visual Arts curriculum development K-12 in NSW since the 1990s and remain an active advocate of Visual Arts education at state and national levels. I also have a long track record of experience in teacher education in Visual Arts and in education more broadly. This experience and my deep commitment to Visual Arts and Design education frames my responses to some of the terms of reference (TOR) for this inquiry.

Preface

Before addressing the TORs I want to express my dismay that the focus appears to prioritise Music education, with the 'arts' as an amorphous and indeterminate category within which other performing and visual arts areas fail to be recognised as distinctive domains which play a role in education in NSW. I would have thought the a parliamentary inquiry of this kind would be interested in the contribution Dance, Drama, Visual Arts and Design and Music each play in the education of students in schools, many of whom may be inspired and eager to pursue work in the creative industries.

The TORs significantly detract from the important role that the Visual Arts plays in education in NSW. Visual Arts is the largest HSC subject of all of the arts subjects in the NSW curriculum, attracting 11.3% percent of the HSC candidature. Visual Arts also sustains the largest cohort of students in Stage 5. This is a trend that has been maintained for as long as I can remember, having been engaged as a teacher and academic in the field for over 30 years. I would also note that Visual Arts, like Music is mandated for study in the NSW Education Act and should be afforded the same level of attentions as Music in this review.

The TORs also posit industry interests against questions of what quality education is in the Arts. This feature of the inquiry reifies educational purpose with the instrumentalities of economic gains. This is indeed problematic. Learning in the Arts provide students with other benefits other than a pathway into work. The curriculum in schools is designed for students to learn about the arts in rich and positive ways, and not be driven to seeing their value as purely in economic terms in this way. The purpose of the school curriculum is not to be confounded with the purposes of a creative industries education. The assumptions underlying this review are highly problematic in conflating these two forms of educational enterprise.

I am aware that other Visual Arts organisations including Visual Arts and Design Educators Association NSW and Art Education Australia will address aspects of these TORs. I will comment in issues associated with teacher education and curriculum development in this response.

I note some comments to the TORs below:

(a) the quality and effectiveness of arts and creative industries education, including:	
<p>(i) progress towards a long-term goal of quality arts and creative industries education courses in the tertiary sector</p>	<p>Diminished resources and support for arts education and a lack of systematic support for arts education in schools is palpable. The focus on national testing in literacy and numeracy in school has led to a diminution of support for arts education across the board. The curriculum is narrowed as teachers are directed by policy imperatives and school leaders to focus time on teaching to the test.</p> <p>The days of a well-rounded liberal education in which the arts play a valued and important role in students intellectual and cultural development are over in most schools. The Arts are seen as an ‘add on’, are costly and can be dispensed with in favour of the core curriculum. The narrowing of the curriculum by the emphasis on high stakes testing is a factor that has impacted the role and presence of the arts as valued and important subjects in schools. This attitude to arts education is also echoed at the highest levels of education in this state.</p> <p>In a recent exchange with a highly ranked curriculum officer at NESA I was informed that the Visual Arts component of the K-6 syllabus did not need to be too complex as students only get 20 minutes per week in that subject, if at all. I was also informed that most often teachers experienced a lack of confidence teaching the arts – the inference being that designing a robust syllabus for k-6 was not warranted. I was advocating for a change in the design of the curriculum to reflect the evidence-based practices we know work in schools, work in supporting students’ critical thinking and making in art and that set high expectations of intellectual engagement for teachers and students alike. So NESA officers diminish and devalue the arts and also the intellectual demand they make on students’ learning.</p> <p>Specialist Primary Arts Educators</p> <p>There is a dire need for specialist arts educators to be employed in primary schools in NSW. Generalist teachers in primary schools do not have sufficient expertise to deliver quality arts education to K-6 students. This leads to students entering high school with uneven arts education experiences, often of variable and/or questionable quality. Public and systemic catholic schools cannot compete with opportunities afforded students attending private school wherein specialist arts educators are employed and offer excellent arts education.</p>
<p>(ii) the present level and status of formal arts and creative industries education across all levels, including primary,</p>	<p>Most recently the NSW Curriculum Reform has impacted the quality and status of the Arts subjects in primary and secondary education. The concern for ‘decluttering’ the curriculum has resulted in low quality descriptions of content in the new syllabuses. There were significant issues apparent in the reform process that impacted the quality of syllabuses in this reform agenda. Some examples of how the revised syllabus development process in the NSW curriculum Reform has impacted the syllabuses in the Arts follow:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lack of open and transparent consultation was a key issue. There was no public facing formal structure that afforded members of the arts education and industry communities to inform the process via an

secondary, and tertiary levels

open program of consultation and representation from key stakeholders. The new process dissolved the NESB Board Curriculum committees which were representative bodies with nominees appointed by stakeholder bodies such as universities, unions, principal's councils and professional associations for teacher in relevant subject areas. The process for appointing advisors to Technical Advisory Groups (TAG) was opaque and non-representative. There was a lack of overall transparency in the process of consultation and no publication of consultation reports for stakeholders to be apprised of developments.

- **With no formal or systematic evaluation of the existing syllabuses K-12 in the Arts to ascertain what works and needs revision, syllabus development was ad hoc and incoherent.** This issue points to the lack of concern for and attention paid to the Arts in the NSW Curriculum. Left till last, the Arts syllabuses which had not been revised since their inception in 2000 when the New HSC was implemented and struck a course for syllabuses design for K-12, have been developed under tight timelines. The political risk associated with fitting arts subjects into poorly conceived templates.
- **No overarching blueprint curriculum design plan for the Arts subjects K-12 in which the theoretical underpinnings of the subjects were described or justified in relation to an evidence-base that sustains a learning continuum in arts subjects.** Instead, the evidence base has been cobbled together to look authentic – lip service only. The syllabus development process has been addressed in a piecemeal way, with K-6, 7-10 and 11-12 syllabuses developed in isolation of one another with no suitably qualified body of experts leading the way. This has resulted in the development of an incoherent continuum of learning for students in the various arts subjects. The current syllabuses generated within the NSW Reform are approximations of what was already in place with content tipped into a new online template. For example, The Visual Arts 7-10 Syllabus bears little theoretical or practical relationship to what is prescribed in the draft provisions for Visual Arts in K-6. Despite attempts to resolve these issues, representations from experts in curriculum in the field of Visual Arts have been ignored.
- **No opportunity for innovation in curriculum design was permitted to strengthen the contribution the Arts make to the curriculum.** Without a considered and systematic review of the evidence base informing learning and teaching in the Arts subjects, there has been no opportunity to refresh these syllabuses after a period of more than 20 years without any significant revision.
- **Australian Curriculum content:** Despite assurances that NSW would avoid the adoption of the Australian Curriculum (AC) content as it had previously been deemed 'not equal to or better than the current syllabus provision', this process has been skewed by the imposition of AC content within the new syllabuses. The AC content arises from a completely different orientation to learning in the arts, therefore contributing further to the conceptual mess that the revised syllabuses reflect. This is especially evident in the draft Creative Arts

Syllabus K-6, the foundational years of learning in the subject in which great tensions between the different arts subjects are evident.

- **Design of online syllabus template** – the template is restrictive, non-negotiable, and therefore fails to register the important nexus between core concepts, a theory of practice and viewpoints that are representative of the range applied in the contemporary artworld. The focus on divorcing knowledge from facts in the curriculum structure guts all of the arts of opportunities for students to realise praxis-oriented learning and teachers to authentically engage in praxis-oriented teaching – these forms of learning and teaching are fundamental to developing knowledge and understandings in all arts subjects.
- **Knowledge as facts:** the new template for the syllabuses favours factual knowledge as core content. One might ask what is a ‘fact’ in subjects that are highly inferential domains of learning in which interpretation is prioritised. This approach to knowledge is outdated, misrepresents contemporary theory in which “powerful knowledge’ (Michael Young) is prioritised, is restrictive and diminishes the representation of praxis oriented approaches to learning which are key to arts learning. The return to factual knowledge means syllabus content described in lowest common denominator terms which both under-estimate students’ capabilities in the arts subjects, but also push against the interpretative and critical nature of knowing in the arts. These issues and many more that undermine the quality and scope of arts curricula in NSW were evident in the most recent drafts of the Visual Arts Syllabus released in the last ‘Have your Say’ period of consultation, as well as in the final syllabises for Dance, Drama and Music 7-10.
- **The suite of syllabuses in Visual Arts remains incomplete.** There remains significant uncertainty of the status of the Photographic and digital Media and Visual Design syllabuses

Significantly, NESA and the NSW Government seems to favour the views of people from think-tanks over specialist education researchers in justifying such moves.

Tertiary Visual Arts Education

The over-regulation of ITE programs does play a factor in shaping the quality of programs and courses in Visual Arts education. The hyper-focus on standardised subject content knowledge that fits with teaching subjects, along with the requirement to address all AISTL standards places a heavy burden on dual degrees in ITE. There is only so much time for discipline studies in Education and Design or Fine Arts. The post graduate options such as am Master of Teaching Secondary are also constrained by this issue to a lesser extent. Students have to have a discipline degree that fits NESA Subject content requirements that are very specific.

Typically in primary ITE education there is a distinct lack of time and attention afforded arts education. More time is allocated to English and Maths to meet the literacy and numeracy demands of the ITE curriculum as specified by NESA/AITSL. In an Master of Teaching Primary students take one course in



	<p>which they spend limited time on all four artforms – so literally four hours per artform, and then are expected to know how to teach these subjects in schools. This can only lead to poor quality arts education in the K-6 context.</p> <p>In recent years the reduction in the number of specialist Visual Arts schools has also reduced opportunities for students to opt into specialist Visual Arts education ITE programs. There are fewer dual degrees that ever before and more generic education options for graduates to take in ITE.</p> <p>With the standardisation of education on the broader scale in universities there is also a dearth of postgraduate offering that cater to need of in-service teachers in arts subjects. In my own experience I designed and implemented a Master of Education (Visual Arts) – it ran for 3 years, with great results and feedback from students, but the cures could not sustain viable numbers of students so was cut in the usual and ongoing rounds of course and program rationalisations that occur frequently in universities. Instead, they complete general Master of Education programs in which they must find their own arts space and are often taught by non-arts experts.</p>
(iii) robust and evidence-based arts and creative industries education in initial teacher	<p>Teacher education builds on an evidence base on learning and teaching in the Arts that underscores the school curriculum. This is requirement from NESAs and is guided by the AITSL Professional Standards for Teachers. At UNSW our programs meet NESAs standards and are accredited on the grounds that we use and update the evidence-base in all subject areas. Our programs are robust and we attract significant numbers of students in our Visual Arts ITE offerings in undergraduate and postgraduate programs.</p> <p>‘Creative industries education’ is not a component of Initial Teacher Education in NSW.</p>
(iv) the role of arts organisations and creative professionals in education and the development of creative skills across the arts	<p>Unfortunately this question (and the curriculum structures asserted in the Australian Curriculum and in the K-6 curriculum in NSW) sustains the view that there are generic skills that can be identified across the arts. This is also reinforced in the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration of Educational Goals for Australian Schools (2019).</p> <p>This is just not the case. Each domain is distinctive and represents unique skills <u>and knowledge</u> that pertain to that domain. To think otherwise supports the possibility of reducing the different artforms and the practices within them to a generic prescription that denies the very likelihood of creativity in any of these forms. In asking this question also lies the possibility of playing into the hands of bureaucratic rationalities that continue to pervade education on many levels. This just obscures the opportunities to embrace difference and diversity across the various artforms in education.</p>
(v) the contribution of the national performing arts training organisations in	<p>This TOR does not pertain to Visual Arts,</p>



<p>New South Wales and the adequacy of the support they receive</p>	
<p>(vi) the efficacy of the current primary and secondary school curriculum in delivering learning outcomes in arts and creative industry-related subjects</p>	<p>The Visual Arts, Dance, Music and Drama curricula conceptualised in 2000 for the New HSC have been in place without revision for 23 years, despite changes to most other subjects in the curriculum. This reflects the overall neglect of these subjects by the NSW Government and NESA in particular. The students who take these subjects and the dedicated teachers who teach them ought to have been afforded systematic and regular evaluations of these subjects, which would lead to refreshed and vibrant curriculum offerings suited to the contemporary context. The neglect shown to these subjects in NSW Education system has been deleterious to the quality of arts education as we have entered the 21st Century and have witnessed significant change in artistic practice in all of these domains. While creativity is highlighted in state and national policy, this has not been reflected in any support for improving the quality and relevance of the curriculum for the Arts. In the most recent reforms to the curriculum the Arts have been left until last once again, a status that reveals how state authorities fail to value the contribution arts education makes to the education of young people in our schools.</p> <p>Yet, these curricula reflect best-practice in their conceptualisation and scope as they are underscored by sound theoretical bases that were established during the systematic evaluation of them that occurred in the NEW HSC reforms during the late 1990s.</p>
<p>(vii) the availability of support for teachers and principals in delivering quality arts education, and ensuring that an inclusive approach is taken towards resource allocation for regional schools across New South Wales</p>	<p>In Visual Arts VADEA NSW supports a cohort of approximately a 1000 teacher membership. This is a voluntary, unfunded organisation. Without the subject-specific professional development provided by VADEA as part of their core commitment to Visual Arts and Design educators, there would be very little provision for Visual Arts educators in all systems to improve their practice in schools and maintain the high standard already evident in NSW schools in HSC results and Art Express exhibitions.</p> <p>The NSW Department of Education provides some support but only to NSW state schools. This support is minimal, generally of reasonable quality, but limited in scope and responsiveness for teachers in regional settings. The Statewide classroom events are well attended, but limited in number and focus.</p> <p>There is limited scope of support for regional teachers in the Arts with some local art galleries and industry organisations offering some professional development options, but these are scarce.</p> <p>With the intensification of teachers' work in school and tertiary settings, there is limited scope for experts in the field to offer purpose-built professional support to arts educators as was once the case.</p>

<p>(viii) the most effective approach for the arts, culture, and creative industries to co-ordinate with the education system to support the development of creative skills</p>	<p>There is a need to improve communications and thus alignments between teacher professional organisations and others arts industry representatives. There does need to be reciprocal understandings developed where in representatives can develop and reconcile their different and diverse beliefs about education and its purpose in different contexts. To combine resources to advocate for better support during times of curriculum reform, for example, would be most welcome and a fruitful endeavour.</p>
<p>ii) the most effective approach for the arts, culture, and creative industries to co-ordinate with the education system to support the development of creative skills</p>	<p>I would advocate for creative industries to learn more about how and why the curriculum is designed as it is. There is a disconnect between practitioner assumptions about education and the purpose of this and realities of curriculum design and implementation. Often the practitioner view trumps art educators' views about what matters and is of value. I have witnessed this in my own organisation where lecturers in art and design talk about helping students to 'unlearn' what they bring to university study – as if the school curriculum and the body of knowledge they arrive with to study art is superfluous to need. This attitude is grounded in outdated assumptions about what is knowledge and how it can be assessed and enacted in learning contexts across school and tertiary sectors. The default position in arts industries always appears to defer to assumptions about innate creativity and self-expression as the basis on which learning occurs, something that the school curriculum resists in making knowledge in arts learning explicit and well theorised as forms of practice. There is also limited respect afforded art educators who practice curriculum and not actual art in my many interactions with creative industry representatives in my discipline. It's about time these two languages were reconciled in some way.</p>
<p>(ix) ways that students can learn entrepreneurial skills and gain industry experience to ensure they are job-ready</p>	<p>This is not a factor I can comment on.</p>
<p>(x) measures of success in arts education</p>	<p>Measures of success in arts education are currently met by the showcase exhibitions (ARTEXPRESS) and performing arts events supported by the NSW Department of Education and NESAs. These are valuable, well regarded by the general public and politicians alike and should be expanded where possible. ARTEXPRESS draw significant audiences to the Art Gallery of NSW and is well supported by regional and other smaller metropolitan galleries. I would like think this program of exhibitions is sustained as teachers and students value it highly.</p>
<p>(xi) factors influencing student decisions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher HECS fees for arts subjects • Material costs and access to suitably furnished studios • Concerns about AI, originality, copyright, and intellectual capital



to pursue further arts education, including but not limited to course choice, course location and the method of study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited number of places in a limited number of specialist art schools which sustain high ATARs • Lack of clear career pathways which sustain good incomes and support graduates to balance their passion and commitment to art practice with the cost of living issues we currently experience • prioritisation of high income jobs over jobs by families not familiar with arts education and the benefits of it to career pathways.
(xii) notable approaches to arts and creative industries education in other jurisdictions	No comment

I am unable to comment specifically on the effectiveness of music education and training, and, as noted above, fail to see why the inquiry reifies music education in this way.

I would also be very happy to discuss further any of the comments included in this reponse.

Yours sincerely

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