

Submission
No 8

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

Organisation: Poetry in Action

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Introduction

Poetry in Action (PIA) is a theatre-in-education organisation that delivers live performance incursions, student workshops, and teacher-professional learning in schools across Australia and the Asia-Pacific. In a highly mediated culture where we must navigate the ambitions of rhetoric acting upon us on a daily, hourly basis, a rigorous education in language and formidable literacy is essential for positive life outcomes.

We are committed to developing this facility in students.

As an arts education organisation committed to fostering creative skills and artistic expression, we at Poetry in Action welcome the opportunity to contribute to the parliamentary inquiry into arts and music education and training in New South Wales. Our submission addresses the inquiry's terms of reference and highlights the challenges and opportunities within arts education, particularly focusing on creative writing and drama.

Quality and Effectiveness of Arts and Creative Industries Education

Creative Writing Education

Creative writing is typically integrated intermittently within other subjects, such as English and Drama, rather than being taught as a standalone skill. This approach often limits students' opportunities to develop and express their unique voices. To address this deficit, Poetry in Action runs an annual poetry competition for school-age students. The entries we receive, often exceeding a thousand entries in a single year, demonstrate the hunger for creative expression opportunities. Our capacity to meaningfully engage with the entries and students is limited by our lack of resources.

All our educational programs at PIA, including the poetry competition, workshops, professional development, and performance incursions, emphasise the importance of creative writing as a means of personal expression and cultural contribution. We advocate for more dedicated creative writing instruction across all educational levels to empower students to produce original works and engage deeply with their artistic practices.

Drama/Theatre Education

Current drama education often lacks industry relevance, with an insufficient focus on acting techniques and industry practices. Drama teachers, though creative and innovative educators of the highest skill, frequently lack professional experience in the **arts**. While understandable, this can lead to a disconnect between educational outcomes and industry expectations. Furthermore, the Drama curriculum does not authentically reflect the demands of the industry, with little to no mandatory study covering industrial practices. Professional development for drama teachers should include industry-specific training to better prepare students for careers in the performing arts. Additionally, incorporating more comprehensive acting techniques and industry knowledge into the curriculum will

enhance the authenticity and skill level of student performances, as well as their readiness for entry into the industry or tertiary training.

Role of Arts Organisations and Creative Professionals in Education

Arts organisations like PIA are crucial in bridging the gap between arts practice and education. By partnering with educational institutions, we provide development opportunities for educators and students, ensuring a more robust and industry-aligned arts education. Well-supported Arts in Education (AIE) organisations can significantly contribute to the professional preparation of aspiring artists.

Support for Regional Schools

Effective arts education must extend beyond the classroom, particularly in regional areas with limited access to professional live performances. Touring education programs are essential for exposing students to high-quality artistic experiences. However, the financial burden of regional tours often falls on arts organisations. Sustainable funding and support for these tours are necessary to ensure all students, regardless of location, have access to professional arts education.

The uniqueness of Poetry in Action's shows lies in their exploration of diverse viewpoints, poems, and speeches from a wide range of artists.

These performances and discussions on universal themes like love, acceptance, death, and self-expression provide a rare opportunity for young people.

Furthermore, abundant research demonstrates the positive impact on mental health and well-being engagement in creative expression, making art in education an essential well-being activity. We are acutely aware of this at Poetry in Action, receiving hundreds of heartfelt entries in our poetry competition each year. While many entries are joyful, students also use the competition as an opportunity to explore and express more challenging feelings and experiences in a safe space.

This was particularly evident throughout Covid when many students in isolated regional areas expressed their feelings of loneliness, confusion, and isolation in the competition.

Recently, in Orange, NSW, a student who saw our show submitted a dark and disturbing poem. We reached out, offering artistic encouragement but also, critically, ensuring they were safe and did not need further mental health support.

It is rare and powerful for a young person to feel comfortable sharing such personal feelings after a 45-minute school performance. This demonstrates the transformative power of arts in education.

It begs the question, "If arts educators like Poetry in Action aren't there for these kids, who is?"

Coordination Between Arts, Culture, and Education Systems

There is a need for specific funding streams for Theatre in Education (TIE) and Arts in Education (AIE) organisations. PIA experiences challenges due to the dichotomy between arts and education funding bodies. We are often told we are ineligible for funding from arts funding bodies as we are an education company, while also being told by education funding bodies that we are ineligible because we are an arts organisation. As a result, we are passed from one body to another, and after eighteen years of operation with an audience reach larger than any other theatre in education program, we still have no ongoing state or federal funding.

As the largest provider of theatre in education in Australia, we have significant overheads, including but not limited to:

- Wages for six actors at union rates for ten months
- Accommodation and transport costs
- Per diems
- Operational costs, including five HQ staff

Our tickets are \$12.50 per student, and with the funding constraints facing English faculties, we cannot increase our ticket prices any further.

With ongoing support, we could plan to expand and enhance our programs and impact. However, with the ongoing dearth of funding opportunities, attempting any significant expansion of our programs presents an existential risk.

A more integrated approach, recognising the interdependence of arts and education, would enhance the effectiveness of arts education programs and support the development of creative skills among students and emerging professionals.

Entrepreneurial Skills and Industry Experience

To ensure students are job-ready, arts education should include opportunities to learn entrepreneurial skills and gain industry experience. Programs like PIA's Young Artist Development Program allow students to observe professional rehearsals, contribute to production development, and engage with industry professionals. Expanding such initiatives will give students a holistic understanding of the arts industry and better prepare them for professional careers.

Measures of Success in Arts Education

Success in arts education should be measured not only by academic achievement but also by students' ability to produce original works and engage with the arts community. Factors influencing students' decisions to pursue further arts education, such as course accessibility and the availability of work, should be considered. Further professionalisation of the arts sector, including more government-funded theatre companies with robust education offerings, will provide greater employment opportunities for artists and enhance the cultural landscape.

Furthermore, school-age students need access to mentorship and development opportunities, particularly in middle to senior high school, as young adults begin to contemplate their career paths. Students should be able to access professional arts practitioners for guidance regardless of their socio-economic status or geographical location. The establishment of well-funded mentoring programs through organisations such as Poetry in Action would be an indicator of success.

Conclusion

Our submission underscores the importance of integrating industry-relevant training, enhancing support for regional schools, fostering partnerships between arts organisations and educational institutions, and providing entrepreneurial and industry experience opportunities. By addressing these areas, we can ensure a vibrant and effective arts education system in New South Wales, preparing students for successful careers in the creative industries.

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this vital inquiry and look forward to the committee's recommendations.

Please feel free to reach out if you wish to discuss the points raised in our submission.

Bryce Youngman
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