

**Submission
No 19**

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

Organisation: Bangarra Dance Theatre

Date Received: 24 July 2024



**Inquiry into arts and music education and training in New South Wales
Submitted: On behalf of Bangarra Dance Theatre**

BACKGROUND:

Bangarra Dance Theatre is the longest standing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander major performing arts company in Australia. For 35 years, Bangarra has been a major force, creating inspiring experiences that promote awareness and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and providing a strong and positive voice for our First Nations people to tell their stories.

Artistic Director and Co-CEO Frances Rings and Executive Director and Co-CEO Louise Ingram lead the company in our commitment to nurturing and empowering the next generation of First Nations storytellers and contributing to all Australians' respect and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders histories and cultures.

Bangarra's youth and education programs aim to ensure that stories and Culture is protected, celebrated and developed through contemporary dance and theatre. We create programs that promote engagement, empowerment and effective learning for First Nations youth. Our education programs target students at all stages of their learning, as well as teachers/pre-service teachers as well as the broader community. Our Youth Programs aim to inspire pride, kinship, and a sense of strength in young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through dance, language, and music, and present a pathway to careers and future opportunities. Our programs are also effective in educating young people on the opportunities in the creative arts, expanding their skills and career opportunities both in the creative industries and beyond

Please find below our submission to the joint select committee in reference to the terms of reference of the inquiry and advice on the priorities for Arts Education in NSW around 'the quality and effectiveness of arts and creative industries education'.

SUBMISSION:

(i) progress towards a long-term goal of quality arts and creative industries education

Arts education is highly adaptable, extremely diverse and can be explored, created, practiced and shared among students of all social and cultural backgrounds including from First Nations, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD), Culturally and Racially Marginalised (CaRM), Disability and LGBTIQ+ communities. Arts education is highly effective in building skills in critical thinking, collaboration, and problem solving also plays a key role in the promotion and maintenance of physical and mental health practices.

For First Nations peoples, the arts are an activation of the ancestral and contemporary worlds that exist alongside each other in a dynamic relationship that affirms identity, connection to Country and to communicating experiences through creative and cultural expressions. Grounded in 65,000 years of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, artistic expression asserts this country's First People's relationship to Place, spirituality, customs, lore, languages and histories.

Significant strides have been made in integrating First Nations perspectives into arts education. However, consistent and responsive strategies are essential for long-term successes. First Nations young people face hurdles when engaging with arts education programs, including lack of early exposure and access,

limited learning opportunities and arts experiences outside city centres – with restricted travel resourcing for regional and remote students, and limited culturally safe and sensitive learning environments.

(iii) robust and evidence-based arts and creative industries education in initial teacher education courses in the tertiary sector

Bangarra strongly advocates for increased professional learning opportunities in early learning, primary and secondary levels to support teachers to effectively teach First Nations content within the Arts, in turn to improve student academic and non-academic outcomes in this learning area and beyond. We acknowledge the important work of Artist-In-Residence programs and teacher professional learning that we support through our programming.

There is currently a lack of opportunities for artist educators within tertiary training offerings. Access to programs led by contemporary arts practitioners enhances the artistic sector development, reducing the need for creatives to seek on-going training outside NSW. It also enhances the sustainability of professional careers, adding income-earning opportunities for practicing artists.

In the First Nations performing arts sector, supported structures and expanded education opportunities for qualification are needed to transition senior First Nations artists to reskill in education and outreach programming; shifting from the stage to education professions. These pathways are to recognise transferable skills and build new skills as teaching artists making important contributions to the education sector.

Bangarra's dancers and alumni are engaged to develop and deliver Bangarra education programs. Bringing their expertise as creative storytellers, artistic interpreters and performers. They are both contributors and collaborators in supporting the successful future of Bangarra's education work. The introduction of expanded tertiary training offerings would strengthen the skills of Bangarra alumni and career opportunities.

(iv) the role of arts organisations and creative professionals in education and the development of creative skills across the arts

First Nations performing arts organisations play a critical role in providing curriculum support (in particular for the cross-curriculum priority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures, the Australian Curriculum V.9). Bangarra does this by conducting teachers' professional development, producing classroom resources, and enabling rich learning experiences, as well as assisting with industry pathways and training opportunities for the next generations of artists, cultural and creative workers.

The education sector looks to Bangarra as a cultural leadership organisation and is frequently seeking opportunities to collaborate on mutually beneficial, appropriately designed programs that have long term impact.

For example, Bangarra provides:

- Teachers' Professional Development program - **Winhanga-rra** (hear, think, listen – Wiradjuri language). This offers in-person, online, bespoke workshops and school residencies that explore creative processes and practices for engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures and to strengthen educators' knowledge and capacity in this area. Winhanga-rra allows for the development of strong approaches to working with First Nation's Cultural content in schools -

respecting the needs of Indigenous students and building strong First Nations community engagement within learning communities.

- In-theatre schools' program – **Wilay** (Brushtail Possum - Wiradjuri language). This offering of subsidised ticketing (and travel allowances where possible through philanthropic and internal company work-place-giving support) enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school students access to Bangarra mainstage performances. This allows Bangarra to build relationships with the next generation of First Nations cultural and creative leaders. Real-life learning outcomes can be gained for First Nations youth by attending live theatre that draws on Indigenous Cultures, such as:
 - Students see their cultures represented and respected on stage and can feel proud and confident that their stories are being celebrated and shared.
 - Young people feel empowered and encouraged to explore the opportunities that exist within performing arts.
 - They can find role models and inspiration within the Bangarra company to make positive choices for their futures.
- **Education resources** free and available for all Bangarra productions – supporting curriculum content.
- Bangarra's production, *Terrain* (choreographed by Frances Rings and first presented in 2012) is currently a compulsory prescription topic for **NSW HSC Dance** and is an example of how Bangarra's works span History, Science, Geographic, Visual Arts, Music and Indigenous studies.
- Our **flagship youth program, 'Rekindling'** – that has been connecting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities across Australia for the past ten years, inspiring pride, kinship, and a sense of strength in young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The program is a long-form residency program that delivers a series of dance residencies for secondary school-aged students. Participants spend time on Country, gather stories with guidance from Community Elders and develop skills to produce thought-provoking performances and events. This program is an important opportunity for planting the seed with young people for career pathways in the arts. It also develops critical psychosocial skills including collaboration, problem-solving, critical thinking, imagination, communication, resilience and empathy. The program ensures that Indigenous students have access to Elders and a community network which supports engagement in school life and uses a structured delivery framework which mirrors school learning structures.
- Bangarra is also working, where feasible, to deepen the industry's **First Nations creative pipeline** and develop and nurture the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural leaders of the future. Bangarra is proud of our contribution to building capacity in the First Nations creative industry, including **annual training initiatives** such as: the Russell Page Graduate Program for emerging First Nations professional dancers; the David Page Music Fellowship for emerging First Nations composers and sound designers; and the Production Trainee position offered in partnership with National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) as a Registered Training Organisation (through completion of a Certificate 3 in Live Production and Technical Services).

All of the above programs are delivered by Bangarra without government support, relying on donors, foundations and corporate partners. Such a funding structure makes these programs vulnerable in tough economic times. Core funding support from NSW Government would help to build resilience in the programs and facilitate long-term planning and capacity building.

Bangarra has also maintained a 14-year strong partnership with the **NSW Department of Education, through the Arts Unit**. In 2024 more than 1,500 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students from 125 public

schools across metro, regional and remote NSW participated in Bangarra's workshops. This includes the Secondary Aboriginal Dance Workshops for NSW Public School groups of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and their teachers and the development and training of the NSW Public Schools Aboriginal Dance Company each year.

The Aboriginal Dance Company is a cultural performance experience for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Years 7-12, who are featured at the State Dance Festival, in the Schools Spectacular and other high-profile events. This program has been designed to connect students to contemporary dance, culture and storytelling.

This partnership is designed to build cultural pride and awareness, as well as dance and performance skills in an education setting. It also provides important pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students an introduction to creative industries and opportunities to develop as professional dancers through training and mentoring, as well as performing and touring with the dance ensemble. These initiatives build vital pathways for Indigenous creatives, showcased by members of our current ensemble coming to the company via this program.

We would like to continue our work to mentor Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary-school students in dance and creative industry experience via our partnership with The Arts Unit, however the support we receive from the NSW Department of Education for these workshops does not meet the costs of resourcing the programs that we deliver. As such, we encourage the Department to review current support for arts organisations to fund such activities in order for Bangarra to continue to offer this critical opportunity across regional and remote public schools in the state.

(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

Currently all Bangarra's youth and education offerings are supported through philanthropic support. Greater collaboration and long-form investment in such programs by relevant government departments, across portfolios (not only in Education, but also e.g. Health, Social Services, Trade and Investment) would support Bangarra to build our capacity to deliver such programs.

We hope to see a priority in government support to grow focused, tailored and culturally affirming training programs embedded in First Nations arts organisations. Including expanded tertiary placement opportunities, emerging creatives industry experience and mid-career development opportunities. Greater investment and support for First Nations arts and cultural organisations will build stronger pathways for First Nations peoples to pursue careers in creative industries as well as beyond.

Culturally sensitive methodologies are necessary for meaningful learning outcomes and a deeper focus on representation and access is required to ensure education offerings are inclusive. Bangarra's programs both complement conventional institutional teaching and training and provide attractive new ways for our communities to engage young people in Culture, Language and the Arts.

(xii) notable approaches to arts and creative industries education in other jurisdictions

- The role of Arts Education in the International Baccalaureate Curriculum.
- Norwegian educational and cultural policy - characterised by an alliance between the culture and education sectors, aiming to render arts and culture available to every child. Three educational schemes that together make up the Norwegian arts education model include the subject of music as core to the curriculum, the culture schools and the arts in school program, and the Cultural Rucksack (DKS).



- Te Whāriki (early childhood education) and Te Marautanga o Aotearoa (Māori-medium education) - promoting traditional Māori arts and ensuring cultural competence

Bangarra Dance Theatre advocates for a culturally responsive and inclusive approach to arts and music education that honours and integrates First Nations knowledges and practices. Bangarra's youth and education programs focus on the importance of cultural engagement, the power of storytelling through contemporary dance theatre, and the range of valuable outcomes that can be achieved through creative learning experiences. By addressing the issues outlined, New South Wales can ensure that its arts education fosters future generations of great Cultural and creative leadership, ensures a broader understanding of First Nations histories and cultures, and continues to see innovation and creativity not only in the arts sector, but across our key industries more broadly.

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you wish to discuss details further.

Sincerely,

Louise Ingram

Executive Director and Co-CEO