

Submission  
No 25

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

**Organisation:** Australian School Band and Orchestra Festival

**Date Received:** 24 July 2024

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

Submission by the Australian School Band and Orchestra Festival

### **Who is ASBOF?**

The Australian School Band and Orchestra Festival (ASBOF) is one of the most significant music education organisations in the nation.

ASBOF was established in 1962. Prior to covid we hosted 365 ensembles and over 12,500 students. In 2024 ASBOF will host over 275 ensembles and more than 10,000 participating students. We do this every year. For perspective, just over 10,500 athletes will participate in the 2024 Paris Olympics!

There is no other event in the country which can boast these numbers, and which enjoys our highly respected industry reputation.

We also hold an annual *ASBOF Sydney Music Educators Conference* targeting instrumental music program educators (Music Directors and tutors), sourcing some of the most respected music educators from Australia and across the world.

ASBOF is based in Sydney and draws the majority of its participating ensembles from Sydney and regional NSW, however, we regularly attract interstate and international schools.

### **Evidence based instrumental music in the curriculum**

The Festival's patron, Dr Anita Collins, is a world renowned expert on the advantages of music education in brain development and its role in preparing the brain for ongoing learning. Her work (which we assume will be made well known to the committee through other submissions) clearly shows that the evidence is incontrovertible, yet at virtually every opportunity, syllabus changes continually marginalize music education.

Over 75% of the ensembles which enter ASBOF are from government schools. The overwhelming majority of these instrumental music programs have been founded and are run by parent organizing committees. These parents often make substantial financial investments to ensure the success of the music programs in which their children participate. These parents instinctively know what the scientific evidence indisputably shows, that a strong and vibrant music program in a school makes for a better overall learning experience and achieves better educational outcomes.

The catch-phrase in education today continues to be "evidence based". Well, the evidence is in. It's time for some action.

Beyond the pressing need to incorporate instrumental music programs in the curriculum, there are a number of other issues in the sector of which we are aware that could readily be addressed by government. Below we will briefly outline some of these issues and provide with some suggested solutions.

### **Issue 1 - an unregulated sector**

At the moment there is no formal education requirement for anyone to take up a role in a school instrumental music program. As one of our experienced, professional conductors has observed, a person can pick up chop stick, stand in front of a band and say "Hey, I'm a conductor!" This is not good

enough. Enormous physical (repetitive strain etc), emotional, and long-term educational damage can be done by inexperienced and untrained music directors (MDs).

Currently, the majority of MDs and music tutors in schools range from music enthusiasts who might play in a local community band, to music education or music performance students looking for a part time job while studying, through to classroom music teachers, many of whom have little or no experience with instrumental music. Only a small number of MDs have formal conducting qualifications.

The late, great Richard Gill, the first patron of ASBOF, had a goal to have qualified music directors in front of every ensemble. With his guidance, ASBOF commenced its Music Educators Conference, and we have been pushing for formal MD qualifications (a Certificate IV or equivalent at the very least) for many years. We are in a unique position to facilitate this goal, we have a clear vision of what this might look like, we believe it could be implemented almost immediately, and we would welcome further discussions regarding this process.

There are also many issues the peripatetic workforce in this industry face as a result of the unregulated nature of the sector and the fact that many of the programs, especially in government schools, are administered by well-meaning, yet inexperienced or unqualified parent management committees. Ensuring that these programs are brought back under the jurisdiction of the school principal, and exploring ways the workforce could be remunerated through the department of education pay structure, would greatly assist in the long term stability and viability of such programs.

### **Issue 2 - lack of venues**

Lack of suitable rehearsal and performance venues, especially in government schools and local government communities, limit both individual existing instrumental music programs and the capacity for ASBOF to grow. ASBOF could easily host another 250 ensembles if we could gain access to suitable (and suitably priced!) venues in which to hold our event.

Just like a sporting code needs fields and change rooms, instrumental music programs need dedicated rehearsal spaces and instrument/music storage facilities. Setting up and packing down an entire band every rehearsal typically reduces the effective rehearsal time by up to 20% of the total time. No football code would accept these conditions on a regular basis.

Additionally, it is rare to see a football player beyond the age of 35-40 years. Almost every community band across the country will have members ranging from the ages of 10 to 80+ years - with very little chance of any band member receiving a debilitating head injury!

### **Issue 3 - no players, no payers!**

It's a very simple proposition. If you want future generations to support and attend our highly regarded professional organisations such as the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Australian Opera etc) then you need to expose them to these musical experiences and repertoire from an early age. Failing to support instrumental music programs and Festivals such as ASBOF will condemn future generations to a limited musical diet of Taylor Swift concerts.

Instrumental music programs and Festival events such as ASBOF are creating the audiences of the future.

### **How can the NSW government help?**

1. Specialist music teachers, with instrumental music program training, in each primary and secondary school – especially the regions.
2. Enhanced music training for generalist pre-service primary school teachers.
3. Work with ASBOF and ABODA (the Australian Band and Orchestra Directors Association) to implement an accreditation process for MDs and tutors in school instrumental music programs.

4. Include industry-informed recommendations for any new school builds to include appropriate music rehearsal and performance facilities.
5. Providing financial assistance to ensure professional development opportunities such as the ASBOF Music Educators Conference are accessible to all instrumental teachers, especially those from regional NSW.
6. Support dedicated instrumental program music rehearsal and performance spaces in all local government areas.

#### **ASBOF has a role to play – how can you help us?**

ASBOF provides a significant performance opportunity for over 10,500 students each year. We are doing our best to ameliorate the issues identified above. The NSW Government could assist ASBOF by:

- Considering a one-off grant capable of setting our organization up in perpetuity. We are a Federally registered Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) and have a proven track record of effective and efficient management of financial resources. A substantial one-off grant would allow us to dedicate ongoing resources to achieving the outcomes referred to above. We have a clear idea as to what this amount would consist of and welcome any discussions.
- Venue hire assistance. In the absence of a one-off grant, annual support by subsidising suitable venues would assist. We currently spend up to 50% of our annual budget on venue hire.
- Including our highly experienced voice in any future discussions relevant to the issues raised in this submission.

We are more than happy to speak further to any of the issues raised here and thank the NSW government for its interest in our sector.

Patrick Devery  
General Manager

Kind regards,

**Patrick Devery**  
General Manger