

Submission
No 28

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

Organisation: Australian Youth Orchestra

Date Received: 25 July 2024

Submission to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry Music education

Exec Summary

The Australian Youth Orchestra (AYO) welcomes the NSW parliamentary inquiry into arts and music education and training in NSW. For over 75 years, AYO has been at the forefront of music training for NSW's finest young instrumentalists and promising arts leaders. Our alumni go on to perform in NSW's leading ensembles and represent the state on the world stage; while many others contribute to the education sector by becoming specialist instrumental teachers.

As the bridge between the education and arts sectors, AYO equips pre-professional artists with a portfolio of skills in leadership, advocacy and performance. With better collaboration and partnership, we can optimize economies of scale and efficiency, while unlocking richer, more impactful opportunities for our young people.

AYO has observed greater pressure on the well-being of our young people. Increasingly young people are having to prioritise STEM academia in a growing assessment culture within the education system over the creative arts and/or extra curricula learning. This choice point is happening at an increasingly earlier age/stage of the developmental life-cycle of a student.

Audience engagement for the performing arts remains a challenge. A lack of exposure to live music in early years appears to be a contributing factor to declining audience trends for heritage artforms and a general decline in young people represented in audiences.

Summary of recommendations:

1. **Recommendation:** for education and arts funding to be contingent on collaboration with training organisations already working in the field.
2. **Recommendation:** increased systemic support for general and specialist music educators across public and private schools.
3. **Recommendation:** live (classical) music experiences to be embedded in school curriculum.

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Introduction

'They're a cultural institution here in this country. Not only does the organisation produce a year-round orchestra, who tour nationally, and internationally, but chamber ensembles, development programs, an annual national music camp, mentoring streams and so much more. It's an organisation that fuels the classical music scene here in Australia, with most professional musicians and music thinkers taking part at some point in their lives.'

- Megan Burslem - ABC Radio Presenter & AYO alumna

The Australian Youth Orchestra (AYO) is recognized as one of the world's oldest and most innovative training organisations for young pre-professional orchestral musicians.

Our training pathway has been created to nurture the musical development of Australia's finest young instrumentalists and promising arts leaders across metropolitan and regional Australia: from the emerging, gifted, school-aged student, to those on the verge of a professional career. AYO presents tailored training and performance programs each year for aspiring musicians, composers, arts administrators and music journalists aged 12 to 30. As one of the Australia's eight national arts training organisations, the Arts8, AYO prepares young people for careers in the arts sector which contributes \$122.3 billion to the economy annually.

When Professor John Bishop OBE and Ruth Alexander convened the first National Music Camp in 1948, they created an institution that would fire the imaginations of over 12,000 young Australian musicians, see its orchestras tour the globe and instill in its participants a love of music and a dedication to the highest standards of performance.

Since 2015, AYO has proudly facilitated the Music in Me program (formerly National Music Teacher Mentor Program) through which a further 14,000 young people have benefited from access to quality music education.

AYO occupies a special place in the musical culture of Australia, where one generation of brilliant musicians inspires the next, where aspiring musicians experience life as professional musicians, and where like-minded individuals from all over the country gather for intense periods to learn from each other, study and perform. On the world stage, AYO has established itself as a cultural ambassador for Australia on twenty-three international tours since its first in 1970. Today, AYO alumni are members of some of the finest professional orchestras worldwide and contribute to Australia's cultural heartbeat.

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Our Purpose

To train, empower and inspire young musicians as Australia's leaders, thinkers and artists, through music education and performance experiences of the highest standards.

Our Future

We place the young person at the centre of everything that we do. In 2024 and beyond AYO recognises that the young person seeks to be heard, to be represented and to have impact. With this in mind, our 2024 – 2029 strategy is formed through the lens of three pillars as it pertains to young people: youth voice; diversity; and impact.

Our Foundation

Access to quality music education from an early age is not only critical to a thriving music sector, it is a human right.

It is well-documented that engagement in quality music education from early years enhances brain development, develops social skills and builds emotional resilience. The correlation between learning an instrument from a young age and literacy/numeracy competencies is widely acknowledged. Engaging with live music experiences from an early age encourages life-long participation in the arts, whether this engagement is as a performer, audience or amateur.

A healthy and flourishing arts eco-system requires cohesion and effective collaboration between school, training, community and professional organisations. However, it is an oversimplification to restrict our thinking to a direct linear or correlated journey from classroom music, to instrumental learning, to community and extracurricular ensemble participation and then to audiences in the concert halls. The life cycle of music participation in a healthy and vibrant arts eco-system is non-linear. It requires opportunities to learn about, to learn to do, to have opportunity to 'make' with others, and to have access to art that 'stretches' (either in terms of artistic, conceptual and technical). This needs to happen at all stages of our life cycle, but it is *imperative* that it starts at early years.

Importantly, when individuals are part of this ecosystem, it promotes a 'societal' appreciation of diverse perspectives, cultural awareness and creative thinking – all imperative to our sustainability as a flourishing society.

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Statement addressing key terms of reference:

(a) the quality and effectiveness of arts and creative industries education, including

(v) the contribution of the national performing arts training organisations in New South Wales and the adequacy of the support they receive

Each year, approximately 550 young people take part in our core training programs. With entry by way of a rigorous audition process, these are the best young musicians in the country and typically 30% are from NSW. In the year following our program, around 92% go on to pursue further study at a tertiary level in Australia or overseas, while 33% find employment. Many participants succeed in applying to our annual programs for up to 10 years.

75%+ of Australia's professional orchestral musicians have trained with the Australian Youth Orchestra. In NSW this year:

- 76% of the Australian tenured musicians in the Sydney Symphony Orchestra are AYO alumni
- 83% of the Australian tenured musicians in Australian Chamber Orchestra are AYO alumni.
- 49% of the 41 tenured musicians in OAO are AYO alumni.

AYO alumni can be found across the globe, with many playing for some of the world's most renowned orchestras including Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra and the Gewandhaus Orchestra Leipzig.

"The international tour was incredibly formative for me as a musician – there were places that we performed in that I might not ever go to again. It opened my eyes to the whole world." – Diana Doherty, Principal Oboe, Sydney Symphony Orchestra

Our alumni give back to the music education sector through specialist music instruction. Some notable examples include: Joshua Clarke (Sydney Grammar School and Opera Australia); Janet Davies (Sydney Conservatorium); Eve Osborn (Private Studio), Verna Lee (various Syd schools & Upper Hunter Conservatorium); Matthew Manchester (Director of Instrumental Program Music at Fort Street High School); Annabelle Swainston (Ensemble Coordinator, Coffs Harbour Regional Conservatorium).

"The precious opportunity to travel abroad and immerse myself in diverse musical forums... is essential for the growth of any aspiring musician. During this trip (to Europe), I intend to receive

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lessons from teachers to gain a deeper understanding of their teaching styles and establish a sense of compatibility. Germany and Austria are my primary destinations, but I am also exploring opportunities in the UK. I believe that these initial lessons with various teachers will not only enhance my musical skills but also help me determine the best approach for my playing.” – Daniel Shao, AYO scholarship recipient

Please refer to Appendices for further information about specific project contributions and impact to the NSW arts community.

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

(vii) the most effective approach for the music and the creative industries to co-ordinate with the education system to support the development of creative skills

AYO is uniquely positioned between the music industry and the education sector. In order to better support the development of creative skills in our participants, we need better access to decision makers in both government and in professional orchestras at both a federal and state level. AYO has encountered professional companies working parallel to, rather than with, training organisations: effectively recreating opportunities already offered by the latter. AYO has 76 years’ experience in delivering training opportunities however there is currently no imperative for professional companies – or state based training organisations - to work in concert with us.

Recommendation 1: for education and arts funding to be contingent on collaboration with training organisations already working in the field – ‘collaborate rather than duplicate’

(viii) ways that students can learn entrepreneurial skills and gain industry experience to ensure they are job ready

AYO’s programs provide our participants with professional experiences at every opportunity. The touring experience follows a professional model with rehearsal and performance at a job-ready standard. Professional development in areas such as media training and wellbeing.

The AYO Professional Immersion (formerly Orchestral Fellowships) is designed for young musicians and arts leaders on the cusp of professional careers. The program acts as a springboard for those wanting to pursue performance at an elite level, or delve into the world of arts administration, providing them with the skills to establish a diverse and successful career in music.

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Participants of the AYO Momentum program are hand-picked to gain teaching skills, access professional development opportunities, and develop skills that will assist them in launching a career as a versatile artist of the 21st century.

AYO delivers non-orchestral training in arts administration, media and communication and sound production, led by industry leaders such as Ed Le Brocq (ABC Classic) alumni of these courses claim Megan Burslem (ABC Classic) and Fiona Allan (CEO, Opera Australia) among their ranks.

Case Study: Equipping our musicians to become teaching artists in a school setting

As our communities and young people grow and change, AYO aspires to be agile and flexible, seeking ways to actively evolve ensuring relevance to our communities.

The Momentum Ensemble in 2024 is leading the charge with two programs that challenge the traditional role of the professional orchestral musician, igniting the imagination of over 300 school children.

Twelve hand-picked AYO Momentum participants worked with AYO alumni Belinda McFarlane (London Symphony Orchestra) and Oliver Shermacher (Australian World Orchestra) to create a transformative reimaging of *Appalachian Spring* for regional school children. Exploring themes of belonging, joy and the environment, this project challenged elite orchestral musicians to consider how to connect to diverse audiences, make relevant classical canon and inspire communities who have limited access to instrumental music. The musicians learnt skills to become teaching artists and mentors for a range of education settings, which is very different to their comfort zone (i.e. the classical concert stage).

Over the space of two weeks, the ensemble worked with four schools in Sydney and Port Macquarie, spanning primary to early high school year, metro and regional, private and public schools, high instrumental skill and learning support needs.

Impact: What the community was saying about Momentum.

“The upskill I felt I achieved from this program was significant. This was by far the most effective community engagement program I’ve been involved in and growing it across two weeks has given me a stronger skill set for the future.” – AYO Momentum musician

“Thanks soooo much again to you all for such an incredible week! We all absolutely loved it and the students gained so much from this experience. Particularly being a regional school, having

access to this opportunity was just incredible and we have certainly seen a shift in the students enthusiasm, motivation and excitement to keep playing their instruments and creating music together” – Classroom Teacher, Port Macquarie

“The space of experimentation and variation was highly appreciated and saw a musical shift within students where many learned improvisation and built confidence through it. The musicians were welcoming and considerate, and demonstrated genuine enthusiasm for their work which translated to their performances and teachings. It was a pleasure to get to hear their stories and their music; it is evident that both myself and my peers were inspired by their hard-earned talents” – Student, Port Macquarie

(ix) measures of success in music education

Each year, AYO receives over a thousand applications for programs in the following year. While the quality of these applications is rising according to the panel of industry professionals, the number and diversity of applicants is not. Almost half of the successful NSW applicants are drawn from 10 schools. Individual teachers in regional NSW are key to producing star players, however the majority of successful applicants are consistently from affluent suburbs on the Eastern seaboard. As evidenced by our participant demographic, the gap is growing between those with access to specialist music education and those without.

Recommendation 2: increased systemic support for general and specialist music educators across public and private schools.

In the past decade, covid notwithstanding, AYO has observed a decline in audience numbers, particularly by young people. This could be attributed to a lack of exposure to classical music:

“Somebody who has grown up going to museums and heritage sites, for example, will automatically feel more welcome and more comfortable in those spaces than somebody to whom they are unfamiliar. The three most underrepresented groups amongst visitors to museums and galleries are people of colour, disabled people, and people from less affluent backgrounds; these are the groups most likely to be affected by threshold fear.” – Annie Dickinson, Rylands Collections, University of Manchester, 2020

AYO strives towards greater diversity both on the stage and in the audience and our engagement and marketing activities are welcoming and accessible.

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Recommendation 3: live (classical) music experiences to be embedded in school curriculum.

Within AYO’s remit, and by every measure, our alumni are overwhelmingly successful. In this regard, AYO makes an important contribution to music education in NSW.

Example AYO Program	NSW representation	NSW Alumni working in Performing Arts	Notable Alumni Placements
2010 National Flagship Touring Orchestra	21 musicians	19	Utah Symphony Orchestra WASO, SSO Sydney Harp School Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen Camerata Orchestra Founder Bowerbird Collective APRA/AMCOS Principal Solicitor Opera Australia Orava String Quartet Affinity Quartet
2013 National Flagship Touring Orchestra	36 musicians	28	Nineteenth Circle UK SSO, ASO, ACO, QSO, TSO, OA Royal Danish Academy of Music Director, TwoSet Coffs Harbour Regional Con
2022 Core programs	175 program positions taken by NSW participants		21 alumni currently working in PA sector 65 alumni currently studying music at tertiary level.

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

AYO has observed that specialized music training has become a crowded market for secondary schools students, compounded by a growing academic assessment culture which influences decision making around commitments outside school hours. Young people who are both musically and academically gifted are choosing to prioritise preparation for academic assessment at the expense of their creative pursuits. Where previously this may have been at

pivotal points in the high school experience (School certificate or HSC) it is now from as early as late primary school.

Many participants cite the residency nature of our programs as being one of the key determining factors in applying to AYO programs, in addition to the high standard of repertoire and the opportunity to connect with likeminded young people from across the state and the country.

AYO has a generous financial assistance program so while this does not prohibit participation in our programs, many of our talented young people would not be able to take part otherwise.

Summary

- AYO is one of the oldest national youth orchestras in the world and specialises in the development of pre-professional musicians and arts workers.
- AYO has a proven track record of over 75 years of training the leaders of Australia's on stage performers and behind stage leaders.
- AYO believes that it is fundamentally important to have quality music education embedded in curriculum delivery from the early years of formal school education.
- There is a growing gap between children/young people who have and have not access to music education.
- This gap is compounded by:
 - a dramatically increased assessment culture in NSW schools which places top down pressure on young people to restrict and narrow their learning experiences.
 - A lack of cohesion and collaboration between local/state and national training and arts providers, limiting opportunities for economies of scale and fundamental sustainability.
- There are many examples of exceptional music education and arts training programs in NSW. However, working in isolation and with a declining foundation (music education in schools), will eventually lead to an unsustainable and unhealthy arts eco-system.