

Submission
No 32

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

Organisation: The Music Teachers' Association of NSW

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The Director

Joint Select Committee on Arts and
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ADDRESSED TO THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON ARTS AND MUSIC EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN NEW SOUTH WALES (NSW PARLIAMENT)

Dear Director

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Music Teachers' Association of New South Wales (MTANSW) presents this submission to the Joint Select Committee on Arts and Music Education and Training in New South Wales to outline how the core business of MTANSW will ensure the success of any future arrangements (for improving access to quality music education for all) which might flow from the NSW Government's consideration of the Committee's final report. Additionally, it points to how the MTANSW could, in partnership with others, help tackle the growing crisis in our schools of disengagement, refusal and mental ill-health. The submission also highlights the establishment currently underway of an Australian College of Music Teachers through the federation of all state MTAs.

THE CRISIS IN NSW SCHOOLS

MTANSW is aware of the urgent crisis in our schools. The questions being asked by the public, policy makers and government agencies are: Why do statistics show alarming trends in student engagement, attendance, truancy, school refusal, mental health, and a sense of belonging? How are schools contributing to this crisis and what must change?

Evidence of a Crisis

MTANSW does not have access to the latest NSW data about the prevalence of school refusal and disengagement. The Committee is well-placed to request this data from the Department. However, we are aware of the following:

- **School Refusal:** Studies indicate [increasing rates of school refusal and disengagement among students](#). The NSW Department of Education reports that school students missed more than 9 million days of learning last year alone.
- **Mental Health and Belonging:** Approximately [one in seven students](#) suffer from a mental health condition, a number expected to rise.

Music as a Solution

Music education has been shown to offer a powerful, fast and relatively cheap means of addressing these issues:

- **Engagement and Learning:** [Engaging students through music can reduce the risk of disengagement and improve overall participation](#)

- **Mental Health:** [Music has profound benefits for mental well-being](#), helping students focus and become more receptive to learning.

MTANSW'S ROLE IN ADDRESSING THE CRISIS

MTANSW recommends to the Committee that it give strong consideration to a state-wide program to ensure music is integrated into classroom teaching, and the life of each school community.

Should this proceed, MTANSW is uniquely positioned to provide vital support by ensuring the knowledge and skills required for this integration are reflected in important aspects of our core business:

1. standards for music education and teaching (aligned with the NESA standards)
2. continuous professional development to maintain accreditation and high music teaching standards
3. pathways to accreditation for music teachers who do not immediately meet the standards
4. Continuous improvement processes to ensure the safety and quality of the settings within which music teaching takes place.

KEY MESSAGES

1. There Will Not Be a One-Size-Fits-All Model for Improving Access to Quality Music Education:

Bespoke arrangements, customised to suit local communities and regions with different strengths and weaknesses are most likely to succeed, especially if they operate in a context where:

- A Set of Evidence-Based Standards for Music Education is agreed by the profession, consolidated, and promulgated by MTANSW.
- Linked to these, a set of evidence-based standards for music teaching is agreed by the profession, consolidated, and promulgated by MTANSW. These must align with higher-order, more generic standards for teaching, such as NESA. Achieving these standards will result in accreditation as a quality music teacher and membership of MTANSW.
- Maintenance of music teacher accreditation flows from demonstrated participation in quality professional development which meets MTANSW standards.
- Pathways to accreditation are offered by MTANSW for music teachers who do not immediately meet the standards.

2. MTANSW is Open to Discussions with the Committee:

We are ready to align our work program in readiness for the implementation of recommendations from the Joint Select Committee on Arts and Music Education and Training in New South Wales, subject to the Government's adoption of the report's recommendations.

See below for more detail.

ABOUT THE MUSIC TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION OF NSW (MTANSW)

Founded in 1912, MTANSW is the peak body for music teachers across all contexts in New South Wales. Our mission is to support music teachers and uphold the character and status of the profession. As the sole accrediting body for instrumental and vocal music teachers in NSW, we encourage high standards of music teaching and learning, provide professional development, social connection, information and support for music teachers, and offer performance and learning opportunities for their students.

Membership: Our membership is open to all music teachers in every setting in NSW:

- Music teachers in private studios
- Music teachers in schools (State, Catholic, and Independent)
- Music teachers in multi-teacher businesses
- Music teachers in tertiary institutions, including regional conservatoriums
- Music teachers employed by corporate providers of teaching services

While accreditation is not a condition of membership, we encourage all teachers to become accredited and support them in their journey with guidance and financial assistance through our Benevolent Fund.

Collaborative Relationships: MTANSW collaborates and aligns with organisations and initiatives such as Alberts (Tony Foundation)/Music Right from the Start, Music In Me, and ASME, and supports their respective submissions. MTANSW distinguishes itself through its focus on the profession, best practice governance structures and processes as per the Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD), and by virtue of having the largest membership base of any professional music association in the state, which is growing rapidly following reforms over recent years. Our submission not only complements the core curricular models proposed by other advocacy organisations but also moves beyond to propose a pragmatic, collegiate, and holistic model. This model acknowledges the crucial heavy-lifting done through extra-curricular delivery by music education specialists—more than 4300 instrumental and vocal teachers in NSW—whether working privately or employed peripatetically in schools, in tertiary institutions, and across the state. These specialists deliver outcomes of musical education not only in schools but also in the broader community, impacting school-age children and contributing to curriculum outcomes. An inclusive and collegiate strategy that brings everyone into a coordinated effort would mirror the successful practices observed in jurisdictions like Finland and Canada.

RELEVANT HISTORY

In May 1977, the NSW State Conservatorium of Music received approval to formally accredit private music teachers with appropriate qualifications or experience. However, during the amalgamation of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music with the University of Sydney in the 1990s, the mandate for accreditation was transferred to the MTANSW. Sharman Pretty, on behalf of the Music Council of Australia, highlighted several fundamental flaws in the Conservatorium's accreditation process: a) It is not normally the place of a tertiary institution to accredit the industry which it serves, and the accreditation was not recognised by any accrediting authority. While the process took on a meaning and a life of its own, it actually was meaningless in this context. b) While there were certain requirements for initial accreditation, once that was achieved there was no further monitoring throughout the lifetime of the accredited teacher. There was, therefore, no career structure supporting the process, nor any financial monitoring or incentives for further professional development. c) The process did not include studio inspection. d) The records were poorly maintained (probably a result of insufficient resources to support the process) and the Directory of Accredited Teachers was, consequently, quite inaccurate ([Gwatkin Jan 2008](#)).

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

MTANSW's four-year strategic plan, already accepted by the Board after considerable consultation with stakeholders, focuses on achieving and maintaining quality standards for music teachers amid continuing workforce shortages and cost-of-living pressures. Key commitments include:

- **Consolidating and Promulgating Standards:** For both music education and quality music teaching, leading to MTANSW accreditation.
- **Managing Professional Development:** Ensuring teachers maintain accreditation through quality professional development.
- **Pathways to Accreditation:** For teachers who initially do not meet the standards.
- **Peer-Led Quality Assurance:** Supporting a voluntary process to ensure safety and quality in music teaching settings.

- **Addressing Past Flaws:**

- MTANSW is actively pursuing accreditation as a TEQSA (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency) provider to ensure our accreditation is recognised and respected.
- We have made a significant investment in the creation of a national online teacher directory, ensuring accurate and up-to-date records of accredited teachers.
- Continuous monitoring and regular studio inspections are being integrated into the accreditation process to maintain high standards and support ongoing professional development.

MTANSW has also established an Expert Advisory Committee to ensure policies, programs, and decisions reflect best practices and evidence. Members will be announced shortly.

MTANSW's COMMENTS AGAINST THREE QUESTIONS OF IMPORTANCE TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE

MTANSW believes that music education across all levels of education (primary, secondary, and tertiary) is inconsistent and often lacking. While there are pockets of excellence, the reality is that many children do not receive any music education in schools at all, particularly in the primary years.

Music is an essential part of each child's cultural inheritance, and depriving them of it substantially limits their intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and cultural development. Decades of research have well-documented the many benefits of music education for all humans.

Primary Level

It is apparent that many children in NSW are not receiving any basic music education. Our members report children who are unable to hear pitch, sing, or have any rhythmic ability. Our members are providing this education to the children in their local area.

Secondary Level

The secondary syllabus lacks musical rigour, shying away from the requirement to teach objective musical knowledge or skills from years 7 to 10. There is also no streaming, meaning that children who have studied music privately are not catered to with the basic requirements of the syllabus. This affects students entering senior years, and it must be made clear to the committee that success for children at the HSC level is only possible with the significant support of private teachers – whether employed peripatetically within schools, via extra-curricular delivery or operating in private studios. In all areas, success in theory, composition, musicology, and performance practices are only made possible with the support and knowledge of private music teachers. This points to a substantial failure to teach music in the school system.

Tertiary Level

MTANSW is shocked at the situation at the tertiary level. Many universities that have traditionally offered Bachelor of Music degrees no longer do so. Those that do are offering courses that are often not fit for purpose; they are neither producing graduates who are able to take up artistic careers nor equipping graduates to teach students, many of whom will indeed go on to teach.

In addition to a significant decrease in quality, the cost of music degrees is also out of reach for many students, thanks in no small part to the doubling of fees for arts courses, currently still in place under Federal governments.

With the cost of living and high pricing being significant factors, and the lack of regulation required for private/peripatetic instrumental and vocal teachers in NSW, it is no wonder that many teachers are not seeking further education. This directly affects the quality of music education offered in NSW.

2. What does MTANSW consider to be the barriers to students pursuing further music education?

Barriers include:

- Lack of time allocated to music in the curriculum.
- Undersupply and maldistribution of qualified music teachers in public schools.
- Prohibitive costs for many in the private sector.
- The increasing prevalence of music teaching by untrained individuals or by teachers contracted from studios and corporate providers, which can lead to inconsistencies in the quality of instruction. Additionally, the inflow of people due to skilled migration strategies and climate change displacement poses a risk of poor-quality music teaching, discouraging further pursuit of music education.

3. How can access to quality music education in NSW be improved?

The basic question comes down to the qualification of music educators.

While governments have seen the clear and important need to ensure that teachers in the school system are suitably qualified, the same cannot be said of the arrangements with private music teachers.

The single and most effective way that the NSW government could improve access to quality music education would be to work with MTANSW to provide adequate regulation of the industry. This could be phased in over a period and would be supported by our VET approved courses so that teachers can achieve accreditation.

MTANSW will continue to be the accrediting authority, but, in addition, believe that we also have a moral duty to support music teachers to achieve that accreditation. We will do that through our Benevolent Fund and with support from the philanthropic sector, which more so than any other professional music association, the MTANSW is well-equipped to do, particularly within the context of MTA federation underway.

As for music education within the classroom, we strongly suggest that the Government look to proven models of mass music education for young children, such as the Kodaly, Suzuki, and Orff methods. These are cheap and effective proven models, teaching students to sing, move, and make music. Having gained these vital skills, the barriers to students pursuing further education will be stripped away.

Given continuing budgetary pressures and workforce shortages, improving access requires diverse, region-specific models involving various stakeholders such as private studio teachers, peripatetic teachers in state schools, teachers in nearby Catholic and Independent schools, regional conservatoriums, and partnerships with organisations like MTANSW, Music Right from the Start, Music In Me, ASME, and regional youth orchestras. These arrangements should be based on the Department's review of existing resources and informed by research commissioned by the Tony Foundation's Music Education: Right from the Start. This research will provide valuable information about what, when, how, and who is delivering music education across the NSW state education system. This is the starting point for building and/or strengthening local arrangements around the schools and their students.

4. For success, these arrangements require a context where:

- A set of evidence-based standards for music education is agreed by the profession,

- consolidated, and promulgated by MTANSW. This work should be completed in 2025.
- Linked to these, a set of evidence-based standards for music teaching is agreed by the profession, consolidated, and promulgated by MTANSW. This work should be completed in 2025. These must align with higher-order, more generic standards for teaching (e.g., NESA). Achieving these standards will result in accreditation as a quality music teacher.
 - Maintenance of music teacher accreditation flows from demonstrated participation in quality professional development which meets MTANSW standards.
 - Music teachers who do not immediately meet the standards are offered pathways to accreditation by MTANSW.

In relation to pathways towards accreditation, MTANSW is proposing a robust framework that supports ongoing professional development and peer-led quality assurance to ensure high standards are maintained across all teaching environments. MTANSW is uniquely positioned to deliver on these initiatives for the NSW government because of its established role and the new directions now being pursued under a Memorandum of Understanding with every state-based MTA.

MTANSW also places a high priority on ensuring teachers are supported by quality resources, including digital online resources which conform to the principles established by the Australian Network for Quality Digital Education. Whatever new arrangements flow from the Government's consideration of the Joint Committee's final report, continuous improvement will be best served by data and information flowing from an independent formative comparative evaluation of the new arrangements undertaken by an independent academic/research organisation.

5. An additional recommendation to the Joint Committee from MTANSW:

There are barriers in every jurisdiction in ensuring that all primary and secondary state school students have access to instrumental and ensemble music education (which includes music literacy) which meets quality standards and is delivered by accredited music teachers. Solutions in NSW (and other jurisdictions) will be easier to plan and implement if the Commonwealth and states/territories support collaboration across all three schooling sectors. Therefore, MTANSW proposes that the NSW Government raise this issue with the Commonwealth and other states/territories in the negotiations to take place on the next National School Reform Agreement (the current Agreement expires in December 2024). It would be helpful if the new Agreement ensures collaboration and the sharing of resources across all 3 schooling sectors to deliver equitable access across the nation to quality music education at regional/community level. In addition, it would be helpful if a national approach to integrating music into classroom teaching and the life of school communities was supported; to tackle the crisis of disengagement, refusal and mental ill-health. The federation of MTAs would be a valuable partner in planning and implementation.

6. Final Suggestion: A Sustainable Solution

We propose that preservice teacher training should enable future primary school teachers to have some qualification in music teaching in line with other successful jurisdictions. The recent "Strong Beginnings Report" shows there is no indication of this being in the discourse currently; the priority remains on foundational subjects like numeracy and literacy. Integrating music into the curriculum as part of teacher training will help ensure that future teachers can effectively incorporate music education into their teaching practices.

CONCLUSION

Music education is a powerful, effective, and cost-efficient solution to the engagement crisis in our schools. By integrating music into classroom teaching and school community life, and ensuring high music teaching standards through MTANSW's initiatives, we can significantly improve student engagement, mental health, and overall educational outcomes.