

Submission  
No 38

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

**Organisation:** Orange Regional Conservatorium

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On behalf of the Orange Regional Conservatorium (ORC), I thank the NSW Government for forming this Joint Select Committee on Arts and Music Education and Training. As the Executive Director of the ORC, I am significantly placed within my community to observe, direct and influence music education and training from Early Years through Primary and Secondary schooling and into Community Music endeavours.

Regional Conservatoriums are pivotal institutions in NSW, serving as major employers of music educators statewide. They benefit from substantial community investments dedicated to fostering music and music education. This support is further bolstered by active involvement from P & C associations, enhancing music programs in schools across the region. The structure of Regional Conservatoriums is distinctive within Australia and possibly internationally, positioning them as exemplars of educational and cultural enrichment. They are not merely centres of musical instruction but catalysts for transformative change, profoundly impacting lives and contributing significantly to both social cohesion and economic prosperity in their respective communities.

From primary to tertiary levels, Music Education is increasingly marginalized, often relegated to extracurricular status or subsumed within the broader creative arts curriculum. Tertiary institutions, including Conservatoriums and University Music Departments, are failing to adequately prepare graduates for the demands of the music industry, resulting in a significant gap between classroom training and real-world requirements—a disparity not typically seen in other professional fields. This disconnect underscores the critical need for training programs that impart a comprehensive skill set adaptable to diverse music careers. Moreover, the current curriculum bias against music diminishes opportunities for skilled practitioners to find employment in educational settings. In rural and regional NSW, the scarcity of qualified music teachers willing to pursue portfolio careers is compounded by inadequate remuneration, exacerbating recruitment challenges and hindering the accessibility of quality music education in these areas.

The Australian Studio Music Industry faces significant regulatory gaps, particularly outside the formal education sector, where oversight and enforcement are minimal, except for NSW Regional Conservatoriums. Unlike professions such as education, accounting, medicine, nursing, and law, there is a notable absence of undergraduate and tertiary training programs dedicated to preparing and accrediting studio music teachers. This oversight hampers the industry's ability to ensure consistent standards and quality across private music instruction settings, where one-on-one or small group lessons are commonly conducted. Establishing formal training pathways and industry accreditation frameworks would not only enhance professionalism but also provide aspiring music educators with the necessary skills and credentials to meet the demands of a diverse student base effectively.

Regional Conservatoriums across NSW are confronted with a host of formidable challenges. At the forefront is the pressing issue of recruiting and retaining skilled music leaders, essential for maintaining the quality and breadth of music education programs offered. Compounding this challenge is the critical need for sustainable funding to support ongoing activities. Alarmingly, funding for Regional Conservatoriums has stagnated without review for over a decade, despite these institutions often serving as primary music educators in their respective regions. The recent increase in salaries for NSW teachers has further strained budgets, as freelance music educators now expect higher compensation levels that Regional Conservatoriums struggle to match. Moreover, cuts within the broader education sector have reduced available funds for schools to engage Regional Conservatorium services, jeopardizing

access to essential music education programs. Infrastructure deficiencies present another obstacle, with many Regional Conservatoriums lacking secure tenure and occupying inadequate spaces that fail to meet accessibility and safety standards for children and vulnerable adults. These challenges are exacerbated in regions where digital solutions are impractical due to poor connectivity, further limiting educational outreach and community engagement efforts. Addressing these multifaceted challenges is imperative to ensure equitable access to music education across NSW communities.

In conclusion, the evidence supporting the benefits of music education is unequivocal. To ensure every young person in NSW has access to these benefits, urgent action is needed to integrate music education comprehensively into school curricula, starting from early childhood through high school. This necessitates a strategic shift in government policy to incorporate STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) principles alongside STEM, recognizing the integral role of music in holistic education. Immediate measures are also required to train and motivate music educators, revitalizing music education and fostering lifelong engagement in communities statewide. Regional Conservatoriums are pivotal in this effort, serving as hubs for training, education, and community enrichment through music. However, for Regional Conservatoriums to fulfill their potential, they require equitable resources and investment that reflect the commitment of their communities, ensuring they can effectively contribute to enhancing music education across NSW.