

Submission
No 45

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

Organisation: Wollongong Conservatorium of Music

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Submission to the Joint Selection Committee on Arts and Music Education and Training in NSW.

Wollongong Conservatorium welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to inform the Inquiry into Arts and Music Education in NSW.

For the purposes of this paper WollCon will be focussed on our role as a Music Educator. In order to be impactful this paper will focus on just four areas which are of primary importance in the opinion of Wollongong Conservatorium.

1. Music in Schools
2. Equitable Access
3. Recruitment and Training
4. Sustainability of Regional Conservatoriums

Following an introduction to Wollongong Conservatorium, the paper aims to briefly highlight the key issue(s) and goes on to offer potential solutions in each case.



Brief Introduction to Wollongong Conservatorium | www.wollcon.com.au

WollCon is one of the largest of 17 Regional Conservatoriums in NSW and celebrated its 50th Year in 2022.

WollCon's mission is to deliver positive change through music. We do this through nurturing a community whose lives are connected and enhanced through music and music education.

We currently have 1299 active students and employ 89 staff.

We deliver our program to people of all age groups and all abilities, across a range of music genres and styles. We serve a geographic area from Berry in the South to Coledale in the North. We also run/support programs on the Far South Coast of NSW in Bega and Pambula.

Page 7 of this paper features an illustration of everything we deliver: Early Years Music to Music Therapy; from individual tuition to group and ensemble activities; from community music to highly advanced flagship ensembles; concerts, events and performances.

In addition, we deliver programs in 25 local schools (the participants in those programs are in addition to the 1299 enrollees shown above) and deliver music theory and composition classes at the Conservatorium. Two of our flagship ensembles are currently touring overseas at prestigious arts festivals.

We are an independent charitable organisation which generates 77% of our income. We receive a Treasury Grant via the Department of Education which represented 14% of our turnover in FY 23.

1) Music in Schools

- Music is marginalised in the public school system. Current structures and curriculum prevent meaningful change from being delivered despite the knowledge and evidence of the benefits of music education in the context of a rounded education.
- We need to create an appetite for music education among our young people and their families. We advocate for investment in early years music education. Get them young!

Through local consultation it is clear that, in general, Principals/Head Teachers accept that music is beneficial and contributes to a well-rounded education.

However, the reasons why music education is not more present in school life particularly in the classroom, from our experience, appear to be:

- Structure of the curriculum (emphasis on STEM and music being just one component of creative arts, particularly at primary level)
- Time constraints of the school day
- Financial constraints (other priorities for funding)
- Lack of access to specialist music educators and lack of music education skills among classroom teachers
- Apparent lack of demand from the student body

Our primary concern is how we can effectively change the culture of a school to embrace music when it is:

- marginalised by the curriculum
- relegated to extra-curricular status (before or after school so not seen/heard during the school day)
- in the case of music in the classroom, often facilitated through relief from face-to-face teaching, therefore the school staff/classroom teachers are not engaging in music activities and learning from them.
- a minority activity for those who can afford to pay.
 - Even in schools the cost of band/ensemble activities (and instruments) is most often passed to parents or parent bodies.

In addition, we believe an appetite for music activities is not being nurtured at pre- and primary school levels so demand for music in schools is not evident:

- When a child moves through the public school system why are they not asking the question... 'Where's the music?'. If they've not been exposed to music activities, they

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may never have an appetite or hunger for more. If there is little or no demand the education system will not see music as a priority. We have to work to create demand.

WollCon runs an exemplary early years music program called ChiME. The retention rate from our early years program to ongoing engagement in music is incredibly high, currently 70%. In our region you are never far away from someone who came through WollCon's ChiME program. We currently have 323 enrollees in our ChiME program who ages range from 1 – 9 years old (plus their adults!). Our key message: get them young.

WollCon's Head of ChiME, Janet Andrews would be more than happy to talk with the Inquiry regarding the importance/impact of early years music. The model at WollCon has been developed over 20 years and might inform a roll out within the pre-school sector. An important component is the involvement of family members in the activities. This creates musical families, families who share music as part of their lives at home and who value music as part of their child's education.

2) Equitable Access

- Universal access to music education at the early stages of the school career will be essential for the future health of music in NSW. It would mean that all young people can access/explore music education - regardless of ability to pay - at the early stages of their musical journey.

Our view is that classroom music education should be freely available and accessible to all young people in pre- and primary school; a universal access model should be adopted for music education from the early stages of education. Without universal access at the early stages of education the appetite for music education among our future generations will not be nurtured.

Whilst this point has been made above it also relates to access. Without a universal access model to music education within the public school system, music education will become (and arguably already has become) the privilege of those who can afford to pay.

WollCon generates the majority of its income from fees. This reflects the fact that we are serving a community which has the capacity to pay for music and music education. Our experience in schools is that costs associated with music activities are often passed onto parents or met by P&Cs. Therefore, music education is at present inextricably linked to the ability to pay. Our view is that this should not be the case at the early stages of education.

Access issues are compounded in regional areas where there are additional challenges relating to travel, availability of music educators (in and out of schools), infrastructure (particularly internet coverage) and geographic gaps in provision where organisations like Regional Conservatoriums simply do not exist.

3) Recruitment and Training

- Regional Conservatoriums could provide training in the field; a 'teaching hospital' approach for applied learning. This will complement Tertiary education and help ensure those entering the music education sector have the skills and mindset required for success.

There is a shortage of skilled music educators with the right mindset to meet the demands of our sector. The submission from the Association of NSW Regional Conservatoriums focusses on this issue.

Our ability to recruit is impacted by

- Our inability to offer competitive rates/salaries
- A shortage of suitably qualified candidates within our region (a much larger challenge for our more regional colleagues)

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WollCon and other Regional Conservatoriums could be the musical equivalent of a teaching hospital. Thinking about the breadth of activity illustrated above as well as training the next generation of music leaders/music educators there is a real opportunity for applied learning at Regional Conservatoriums to complement Tertiary Education.

For instance, University students from across Australia or cohorts of trainees could undertake placements/electives at Regional Conservatoriums to find out how they might best apply their musical skills for their future career. They could try their hand at everything from 1-2-1 Studio Teaching to conducting an ensemble; from early years to Music Therapy; from performance to production; all mentored by experienced teaching staff. They'd also get to know what it is like to work in a regional area and the opportunities available beyond our urban centres.

To make this happen WollCon (for example) would have to embrace its role as a trainer as well as music educator; upskill its staff to be mentors to those students undertaking a placement; administer the program, recruit, fund the students (travel/accommodation/subsistence) and pay the mentors... This is beyond our financial/organisational capacity at present and would require additional funding from partners (or from the student placements themselves). There is also the question of accreditation (if considered necessary).

Given the current lack of opportunities for applied learning 'in the field', Regional Conservatoriums represent an opportunity to greatly enhance Tertiary level music education and training.

Case Study: A young female composer Mikaela Johnson is currently undertaking a two-year placement as Director of WollCon's Community Symphony Orchestra, partly funded by Create NSW. She receives mentoring and is paid.

Our Orchestra needed new energy and refreshed leadership. Mikaela is committed to community music and is an early career conductor needing experience.

This is one example of how the resources at a Regional Conservatorium can be made available to develop the next generation without compromising participants experience, in this case it's quite the opposite.

4) Sustainability of Regional Conservatoriums

- Regional Conservatoriums cannot sustain their activities at current levels without increased investment relating to funding for core activities as well as infrastructure.

Grant funding via the Regional Conservatorium Grant Program is welcomed and valued by our communities. However, core funding for Regional Conservatoriums has not been reviewed for over 10 years.

Despite having achieved growth over a number of years and having reserves, WollCon is taking steps to ensure the long-term sustainability of its underlying business. We are taking action now whilst we have financial capacity to do so. We are mindful of the current economic climate and that we operate in the discretionary spend space. We see fewer opportunities for raising funds to support our work, and our grant income has, in real terms, declined over recent years.

The requirement for growth within the Regional Conservatoriums Grant Program is not sustainable and should be removed, particularly if the grant program's funding is not increased.

Unrealistic growth targets within the grant program sets recipients up for failure and can drive poor decision making. Our view is that the growth imperative within the RCGP arguably encourages volume at the expense of deep, good quality engagement with music and disregards regional nuances.

Like many other Regional Conservatoriums WollCon does not have security of tenure in our facilities despite being an important educator, cultural and economic contributor. Capital investment in our facilities has been kept at a necessarily modest level for many years because of the lack of security of tenure. This means the facilities are, overall, under par.

A strategic position from the NSW Government on the infrastructure required to deliver high quality music education (supported by an investment strategy) could benefit Regional Conservatoriums, particularly when negotiating with other stakeholders such as Local Councils.

Conclusion

WollCon welcomes this Inquiry and the opportunity to offer a submission. This submission has focussed on Music Education and made the key points:

- Music is marginalised in the public school system. Current structures and curriculum prevent meaningful change from being delivered despite the knowledge and evidence of the benefits of music education in the context of a rounded education.
- We need to create an appetite for music education among our young people and their families. We advocate for investment in early years music education. Get them young!
- Universal access to music education at the early stages of the school career will be essential for the future health of music in NSW. It would mean that all young people can access/explore music education - regardless of ability to pay - at the early stages of their musical journey.
- Regional Conservatoriums could provide training in the field; a 'teaching hospital' approach for applied learning. This will complement Tertiary education and help ensure those entering the music education sector have the skills and mindset required for success.
- Regional Conservatoriums cannot sustain their activities at current levels without increased investment relating to funding for core activities as well as infrastructure.

WollCon welcomes further input and consultation. We are happy to provide any additional information or consultation with specialist members of our team.

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