

Submission  
No 46

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

**Organisation:** Riverina Conservatorium of Music

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## **Riverina Conservatorium of Music**

### **Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Arts and Music Education**

The ability to participate in arts, cultural and creative activities is a fundamental human right. This has been recognised by the NSW Government's in its Creative Communities Policy released in December 2023. However, despite these statements, access to an education in music is a privilege reserved for only those with the means to pay for it. The Riverina Conservatorium of Music, based in Wagga Wagga NSW, reaches over 1500 students across the broader Riverina region. Notwithstanding these impressive numbers, the number of students unable to access music education dwarfs the number of students actually enrolled in music education programs.

Until there's a clear policy position defining and resourcing the value of music education, participation in music education will continue to decline. In particular, access to music education in regional and rural NSW will flounder unless a policy framework in which life-long music education can thrive is developed and implemented.

The Riverina Conservatorium of Music (RCM) urges the NSW Government to accept the highly publicized and recognised science in the areas of cognitive brain development which proves the power and benefits of music education to all aspects of learning. This would require the NSW Government to reposition music education as a more central component of the education of our young people, particularly in Public Schools.

Further, the RCM urges the NSW Government to recognise the vital role of music education as a critical tool in a well rounded education with appropriate resourcing. This will support the sustainability, diversity and cohesiveness of communities across the State. In effect, the RCM requests that the NSW Government enable resources to ensure that every child in NSW, particularly those in public schools, can access regulated music education as a basic educational right.

The following points address key concerns identified by the RCM as significant factors in the development of a workable policy framework

#### **1. The Riverina Conservatorium of Music**

- a. The RCM is one of 17 NSW Regional Conservatoriums funded by the NSW Government through the Regional Conservatoriums Grants Program administered by the NSW Department of Education. The RCM is one of the

largest NSW Regional Conservatoriums. However, government funding only constitutes approximately 24% of its total budget. The RCM can only exist as a social enterprise model with 75% of its annual expenditure budget being provided through fees for music education and donations.

- b. The RCM is the only organization in the Riverina whose primary purpose is the development of music education opportunities for persons of various ages, cultural backgrounds and economic diversities across an enormous geographic region providing lifelong access to music and music education.
- c. Outside the formal education sector we are the largest employer of music educators and music teachers in the State. The RCM employs over 40 qualified music educators with specialists in traditional western and contemporary music.
- d. The RCM works with over 1500 students. It works with students from over 41 schools across the region and presents over 200 public performances a year.

## **2. Insufficient Funding for NSW Regional Conservatoriums**

- a. NSW Regional Conservatoriums represent a unique and highly successful music education system and framework not currently available in any other state in Australia. The network provides access to music education for over 20,000 students and has a strong focus on program provision for NSW Public Schools.
- b. At the core of the issues regarding Music Education in NSW is the lack of funding to support accessible music education. Based upon the principle that Music Education is a core educational right rather than a privilege, the current funding of Regional Conservatoriums is unable to facilitate accessible access. Core funding through the RCGP provides resources to support administrative and physical infrastructure but is not designed to provide music education services that are financially accessible for a vast proportion of the public school community.
- c. The current funding model is so limited that most children in our communities miss out on music education both at school and through community music educational programs. In particular, as the core RCGP funding is designed to support programs and students in Public Schools, the funding framework operates naively that Schools, students and families in NSW Public Schools have the capacity to afford the price of music education services that are not actually funded by the RCGP.
- d. Despite highly researched, documented, and recognised work that Music Education improves children's learning, emotional regulation, communication skills and general wellbeing, Music Education funding is in decline and participation is very poor/low.
- e. The current funding model does not support the employment of qualified music educators. Under the current funding model, qualified music educators are able to earn more doing unskilled work elsewhere than they can working as a music educator. This is due to the fact that remuneration levels for music educators is low in comparison to unskilled work in other sectors.

- i. This factor is a major contributor to the shortage of teachers in the sector which will be explored further below in section 3.

### 3. Teacher Shortage and Tertiary Disconnect from the Music Education Industry

- a. It is not uncommon for national searches for new teachers to result in zero applicants for salaried permanent part-time teachers. Despite almost overwhelming support for music education, there is a myth that it's not possible to sustain a career as a musician/music teacher in Regional NSW and that the opportunities for career growth and performance are not there. The primary drivers for these perceptions and the shortage of teachers are:
  - i. Poor/ low salaries for instrumental/ vocal studio teachers.
  - ii. Very few and poorly developed undergraduate tertiary sector training for instrumental/ vocal studio teachers.
- b. Access to music education across NSW is compromised by a lack of qualified music educators with the right mindset to be effective leaders in regional and rural NSW.
  - i. This problem is particularly exacerbated within regional and rural NSW by:
    1. Unattractive remuneration particularly
    2. Economic impacts on regional cost of living.
    3. Limited economic, industrial and social enticements for regional and rural living.
    4. Limited performance opportunities.
    5. Limited access to significant, major or internationally renown performances.
- c. It's common practice in other sectors for the tertiary sector to be fully engaged with the industry for which they are training professionals. The Australian tertiary music sector places itself above the industry and does not engage with the industry to understand what is required for graduates entering the music education industry.
- d. Consequently, the Australian Tertiary Music providers are completely out of touch with the reality of non-tertiary and community music education. They are unable/ unwilling to provide industry connections and links to support graduates entering into the music education industry. In part this is also due to the lack of regulation and articulated industry standards and compliance requirements for instrumental/ vocal studio teachers.
- e. The tertiary sector continues to promote elite level performance as the only visible purpose of modern tertiary degrees in music. Graduates are ill-prepared to work in music education (studio teaching or classroom teaching). **A great musician or composer without regulated pedagogical training, mentoring and experience does a person as a teacher.**
- f. Post-graduate pedagogy programs are few and far between and are primarily taught by tertiary teachers who have little experience, knowledge or capacity to teach non-tertiary and community music education.
- g. The tertiary sector is resistant to engaging with peak bodies such as the ANSWRC to build industry ready graduates who are not only meaningful

musicians, but capable and skilled studio music educators. Rather, the tertiary sector takes a paternalistic view of the teaching industry and views its role as a provider of future students rather than as an employer of its graduates.

#### **4. The Australian Studio Music Industry is largely unregulated**

- a. With the exception of NSW Regional Conservatoriums, private music education providers are unregulated and unpoliced.
  - i. Any individuals can engage in professional music education practice with:
    1. No qualifications of formal training
    2. No oversight of Child Protection, WH&S, policies or adherence to government legislation regarding taxation, business management, insurance or professional development.
    3. No formal or recognised curriculum (the Australian Music Examinations Board [AMEB] provides an examination Syllabus but is not a curriculum framework)
    4. No undergraduate tertiary training programs supporting studio music teaching in partnership with the industry (unlike accounting, medicine, nursing, law, education generally).

#### **5. Music Education in NSW Public Schools:**

- a. Music Education in NSW is in systemic decline from the public school system to Tertiary level.
  - b. There is denial about the value of music education therefore it is relegated to extra curricular activity or a subset of creative arts
  - c. Specialist Tertiary institutions (Conservatoriums and University Music Depts) are not equipping graduates for the industry into which they are entering
  - d. Curriculum in non-specialist Tertiary institutions reflects the systemic decline eg:
    - i. Education faculties are reducing units of study in music and arts curriculum.
    - ii. Music Specialisation within post graduate education degrees are being reduced and diluted across other art forms.

6. Music Education is marginalized in the school curriculum. However, it is proven that it delivers untold benefits. The RCM urges the Government to accept the science and take action to remedy the lack of access and quality in music education.

#### **Conclusion**

The Riverina Conservatorium of Music, one of the largest NSW Regional Conservatoriums, provides music education services to over 1500 students from across the wider Riverina region. It has identified that the most compelling challenges for music education in the Riverina are:



1. Severe shortfall in funding for music education at Regional Conservatorium,
2. Severe shortfall in funding to support music education programs in Public Schools,
3. Massive shortfall in qualified music educators specializing in instrumental and vocal studio teaching.
4. A huge disconnect from the Australian tertiary sector that fails to build vocational connections to the studio music education sector. In particular, the tertiary sector takes a materialistic and elitist position in relation to the non- tertiary sector and fails to recognise that the non-tertiary music education industry is the primary employer of its graduates.
5. A massive lack of regulation governing and policing the private music education industry. This lack of regulation fails to regulate Child Protection, WH&S, Industrial Conditions, educational quality and industry standards.
6. The NSW school education system has diluted the role of music education to such a significant extent that many students will pass through primary school in NSW Public Schools with little to no access to a specialist music educator. The curriculum has devalued the role of music education as a vital tool in supporting the intellectual, educational and psychosocial wellbeing of students. In doing so, the education system has ignored decades of research outlining the extraordinary role of music in the education of our young people.

The RCM appreciates the importance of this inquiry and we look forward to working with the NSW Government to support the development of Music Education into the future. We look forward to securing the right of every person in NSW to be able to engage and participate in music education.

Hamish Tait  
CEO/ Director: Riverina Conservatorium of Music  
Wagga Wagga - July 2024.