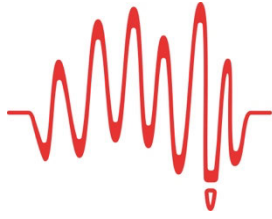


Submission
No 48

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

Organisation: Australian Society for Music Education - NSW Chapter

Date Received: 25 July 2024



ASME
New South
Wales

14 July 2024

Joint Select Committee on Arts and Music Education and Training in New South Wales
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to address the many important issues concerning Music and Arts Education currently before the committee.

Introduction

The NSW Chapter of Australian Society for Music Education (ASME NSW) is a peak professional body representing music educators across sectors and different educational contexts in NSW. Music education in NSW is multifaceted with education and training occurring in schools, tertiary and TAFE institutions, regional conservatoriums, private instrumental/vocal studios, community ensembles and more informal contexts. These fields are heavily interdependent and collectively help support the development of musicians in diverse settings. ASME NSW is the only professional association that represents practitioners across all these domains.

On the NSW committee we currently have members from a broad variety of contexts, not limited to but including those who are involved in initial teacher education (ITE); High School Teachers and Primary School Music Specialists. We have committee members who are working in Music Curriculum support in the Department of Education, some who work in the public sector and some who work in the private sector. We have committee members who are instrumental teachers. We have committee members who deeply understand the subject of Music, holding roles such as New South Wales Education Standards Authority (NESA) Music Chief Examiners, Senior HSC Written and Itinerant Markers, International Baccalaureate Music Teachers and Music Tertiary Lecturers. Amongst our committee we also have members who are in positions of leadership, such as Deputy Principals, Directors of Teaching and Learning, Heads of Creative Arts, Performing Arts and Music within their school setting.

ASME NSW has had a consistent voice in the space of curriculum reform in NSW, we are seen by organisations such as the NESA as a key stakeholder. Furthermore, many of our members

are involved in ITE, and we have been a consistent provider of professional development offerings in NSW for nearly 60 years.

ASME NSW understands that Music education is an essential component of a well-rounded curriculum, offering profound benefits for children's cognitive, emotional, and social development throughout their educational journey. Recent research consistently demonstrates the far-reaching impact of quality music education on various aspects of learning and personal growth. For instance, comprehensive studies by Robinson (2021) and Crooke and McFerran (2019) published in the *Australian Journal of Music Education* found that music programs in schools significantly enhance students' social-emotional well-being, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This aligns with findings by Barrett et al. (2020), who observed that music education fosters improved self-regulation and social skills among primary school children. Furthermore, the cognitive benefits of music education are well-documented, with studies showing enhanced spatial-temporal reasoning, improved memory, and increased language proficiency among students engaged in regular music learning (Hallam, 2019). In the Australian context, Humberstone and Fuller (2022) highlighted the positive impact of culturally responsive music education on Indigenous students' engagement and academic performance. Additionally, music education has been linked to improved mathematical abilities, as demonstrated by Vaughn's (2020) meta-analysis, which found a consistent positive correlation between music training and mathematical achievement across various age groups. Beyond academic benefits, music education plays a crucial role in students' emotional and spiritual development. Eerola and Eerola (2014) observed that extended music education enhances overall quality of school life, fostering a sense of belonging and community among students. This is particularly significant in light of increasing concerns about student well-being and mental health. Moreover, participation in music ensembles and performances cultivates teamwork, discipline, and self-expression, skills that are invaluable in both personal and professional spheres (Biasutti, 2017). Given the overwhelming evidence supporting the multifaceted benefits of music education, it is imperative that policymakers, educators, and leaders prioritise the provision of continuous, sequential, and high-quality music education throughout every year of a child's schooling. By doing so, we not only enrich students' educational experiences but also equip them with essential skills and attributes for success in the 21st century.

In order to prepare this submission, ASME NSW held an open hybrid (online/ in person) meeting, where our response to the terms of reference was discussed. We have sought the views of our membership base in preparing this submission, and we also received written submissions from members, that are considered in preparing this submission. ASME NSW is well placed to reflect the experience, recommendations, and observations of our membership, along with using the committee's deep understanding of the music education landscape in NSW. This submission aims to speak specifically to the terms of reference dealing with music education.

Progress towards a long-term goal of quality music education, including actions to address identified barriers

To progress towards a long-term goal of quality music education, one needs to have a strong idea of what this looks like in practice. ASME NSW suggests the framing provided in Albert's review *Music Education: A Sound Investment* (Collins et al., 2020) provides a clear foundation to start. Identification of the following factors is particularly relevant.

- All students are musical and capable of musical learning, therefore there needs to be a commitment to the music education for every child
- Music education needs to start early, be continuous and sequential, continuing over a number of school year.
- Music curriculum needs to be delivered by properly trained music teachers, who deliver music education through methodology which is engaging, and supports active learning.

ASME NSW observes that there is a gap in knowledge across the sector and within Education authorities about what is happening with Music Education in NSW schools, particularly in the primary education space. Whilst it is often stated that independent schools have continuous sequential programs, delivered by specialist teachers (Collins et al., 2020, p. 23), this statement is not universally supported by survey evidence. In fact, Ardzejewska et al. (2010) found that there was a predilection in NSW Government Schools for music to be delivered by music specialists. Judgements concerning what the reality of music education delivery in NSW primary schools, is currently centred around anecdotal evidence due to a lack of robust research, therefore there is little current factual evidence. The most recent thorough assessment of music education in Australia was the 2005 National Review of School Music Education (NRME). While this study was extensive, it's important to note that participation was voluntary, with teachers choosing whether to take part. This opt-in approach may have influenced the representativeness of the data collected. Prior to the NRME, the Russel-Bowie survey of 1993, which concentrated on NSW, was noteworthy for generating over 1,400 responses. Lane's 2019 study of creative arts in NSW primary schools is also significant, as it directly addressed the barriers to primary school music education. Despite these important research efforts, none definitively answered the question of which NSW primary schools are delivering a sequential, continuous music curriculum. Consequently, the precise state of music education in NSW remains largely a matter of conjecture but ASME NSW membership provides insights into the reality of music education in NSW.

Members of ASME NSW indicate that the School Principal is the most crucial factor in the success of a primary school music program. This view is supported by Lane's 2019 study, which includes statements from primary school principals emphasising their pivotal role. One principal notably remarked, "If I were to fall under a bus tomorrow, it'd[music education would] all die" (p. 199). Lane's research also underscored the inadequacies in Initial Teacher Education (ITE). The ongoing reduction in ITE hours for primary school teachers has been long recognised as a significant obstacle to the effective delivery of music education in primary schools. It is well documented that the diminishing preparation time leaves many primary teachers ill-equipped to provide comprehensive and effective music education (de Vries, 2011, 2013; de Vries, 2015; Garvis & Pendergast, 2012; Hocking, 2023; Jeanneret & DeGraffenreid, 2012; Jeanneret & Stevens-Ballenger, 2013).

***Recommendation:** ASME NSW recommends that a comprehensive survey of the delivery of music education in NSW Primary Schools is established. This survey is to include the qualifications of those teaching music, and the hours given to the delivery of music education in each year of schooling. The survey is to be cross-sector and K-6.*

The current state of Primary School Music in NSW

The K-6 Creative Arts Syllabus is delivered by a mix of primary music specialists and generalist classroom teachers. Teachers acting in the role of specialist primary music teacher often have either completed secondary music education degrees (with varying levels of focus on primary music, if any, depending on ITE program), or are generalist teachers with an interest/expertise in music. There is currently no formal NESA accreditation for music specialists in primary schools. Similarly, there is no permanent employment pathway for primary music specialists in public schools, other than completing training to become a generalist classroom teacher. This leads to most music education graduates working in secondary schools, with those interested in pursuing primary music working in Independent schools for stronger job security. Many primary music specialists work across multiple schools, which can lead to isolation and marginalisation within school communities. Again ASME Members attest that within K-12 Independent schools, high school music teachers commonly support the delivery of the K-6 Creative Arts syllabus in the primary years.

The need for a sequential and continuous nature of music education is not well realised within the K-6 Creative Arts Syllabus. Due to the necessity of meeting outcomes in four art forms, the delivery of music education is often piecemeal, (Lorenza, 2018; Pascoe et al., 2005; Power, 2011), as there is a lack of clear direction given as to the division of time between the art forms. There is a widespread misconception that music is a challenging subject to teach, which has led to a preference for other art forms perceived as less technically demanding (de Vries, 2011; de Vries, 2018; Lane, 2016). This erroneous belief undermines the importance and accessibility of primary music education. In NSW, this mindset has created a tenuous situation for the arts in general, with music finding itself in an especially vulnerable position. It is crucial to recognise that music, like other subjects, can be taught effectively with proper training and support. By addressing these misconceptions and emphasising the value of music education, we can work towards ensuring its rightful place in the curriculum, thereby enriching the educational experience of all students.

Moving forward, ASME NSW advocates that the new K-6 Creative Arts Syllabus is both sequential and continuous. Empirical evidence suggests that many schools do not offer music over the entire school year. For example, a class may complete a term of music at the beginning of a Stage and not return to music education until the following year. ASME NSW suggests that this model of fragmented and disconnected modules in teaching music across a stage is not continuous and does not support deep learning (Carter, 2021). Rather, Music education needs to be part of the continuous provision of Creative Arts learning in primary schools. The current lack of mandated hours specifically for music in the K-6 curriculum has been identified as a significant barrier, leading to its frequent omission by teachers (Lane & Mercer, 1999; Lane, 2016). This situation undermines the ability of educators to deliver ongoing and sequential music learning experiences.

In some schools, music education is limited to “opt-in” extracurricular ensemble activities such as choir, concert band and musical productions. Lane’s (2019) study revealed that found that in some settings where students to opt in to band and instrumental programs, the remaining students did not receive any music tuition at all (p. 225). These approaches are problematic, as these types of programs fail to comply with current curriculum requirements. ASME NSW members understand that high quality music education relies on rich learning activities that is much more than mastery of complex instruments and Western notation. We propose a broader more inclusive approach, based upon the continuous, sequential music education program for all students, delivered in a manner that is achievable for classroom primary teachers. It is worth noting that the National Music

Mentoring program has demonstrated significant success with its vocally-based approach. This model could serve as an inspiration for developing a more accessible and inclusive music education program that aligns with curriculum requirements and provides a solid foundation for all students, regardless of their instrumental proficiency or prior musical experience. (Barrett et al., 2020).

Considering insufficient teacher training and inconsistent delivery methods, it is comprehensible that generalist primary school teachers often lack confidence in providing music education. Furthermore, considering the challenges in establishing a sustainable career in primary music teaching, many schools have resorted to relying on external providers to meet their music education needs. Whilst these external providers undoubtedly offer valuable support in curriculum delivery, there is an urgent requirement for a formal accreditation process for such enterprises. Additionally, there is a need for heightened scrutiny of their teaching programs. This approach would ensure the maintenance of high standards and consistency across primary music education. Implementing these measures would not only enhance the quality of music education but also provide reassurance to schools, teachers, parents, and educational authorities. It would further serve to professionalise the sector, potentially creating more sustainable career paths for music educators.

Barriers to Primary Music Education

The lack of a teacher code in DOE schools.

Currently there is no subject teaching area code for music teachers in NSW Primary schools. For context, there are subject/ teaching area codes for general teachers, STEM specialisation and Primary Languages, however the Music Code falls under “skills and experiences” (NSW Department of Education, 2024). ASME NSW affirms that the implication is that is if a teacher with secondary music qualifications ends up teaching in a primary school, there is no pathway to permanency for them, and they end up on long term temporary contracts, which in turn impacts career progression. Many excellent teachers leave their roles due to these dynamics and lack of job security. To support the sustainability of classroom music specialists in primary schools, there is a need for NESAs accreditation and recognition of this role within ITE music education degrees. Furthermore, a DOE subject teaching area code for Music in NSW DOE primary schools is essential. To reduce inequity across sectors and broaden access to music education, music specialists working in NSW DoE primary schools must have a pathway for permanent employment.

***Recommendation:** ASME NSW recommends the creation of NESAs accredited roles for Primary music specialists and pathways for permanent employment in NSW Department of Education Schools.*

Inadequate ITE for primary school generalist teachers

ASME NSW understands that NESAs subject eligibility guidelines for accreditation as a primary teacher is deliberately very broad, with the equivalent of one year’s full time study in a key learning area (KLA) meeting the requirements. The issue with this, is that it leaves music within the KLA of creative arts, with no breakdown of how many hours should be given explicitly to music. Furthermore, there is no requirement that a generalist primary school teacher has studied any creative arts, let alone music. This diminishes ITE in an art form which many teachers are afraid of teaching, and on record as wishing it was taught by specialists (Ardzejewska et al., 2010; Russell-Bowie, 2009). To support generalist teachers in the delivery of culturally relevant, ongoing and

sequential music education, more time must be allocated to music (and broader arts education) in ITE degrees. In addition, the tertiary sector has the potential to provide generalist teachers with further training (i.e. Graduate Diploma in Primary Music Education) to gain accreditation for such roles.

***Recommendation:** ASME NSW recommends a significant increase and mandated number of hours for music (and arts education) in ITE Primary Education degrees.*

Insufficient and ‘unclear’ teaching time for Music in primary schools

The inclusion of Music within “the Creative Arts” has many admirable aspects to it, not least of which is the possibilities for integrated practice (Ewing, 2012). However, the vague definition of hours is inadequate for the provision of music education. This is a poorly researched area, however feedback from our members is that in practice many schools teach Visual Arts all Year, and then “carousel” music, drama and dance. ASME NSW attests that having mandated hours for music, in the same manner as Stage 4 is essential for music education to be delivered continuously and sequentially.

***Recommendation:** ASME NSW recommends a mandated number of hours for music in each year of learning, K – 6.*

***Recommendation:** ASME NSW recommends that music is delivered in a continuous and sequential fashion in primary school. That is, music education is mandated to occur in every term, of every year of primary schooling.*

The Current State of Secondary Music Education in NSW

Music is in a significantly healthier position in secondary schools, thanks largely to the Mandatory Stage 4 Music Course. For many students in NSW, this is the first opportunity to be taught by a music education specialist. It is important to note that the provision of music specialists in high schools is not universal, with many schools in rural and remote areas (and pockets of greater Sydney) relying on teachers trained in other subjects to deliver the music curriculum. This aligns with the broader teacher shortage in NSW and teacher attrition in early-mid career stages.

Public selective Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA) high schools are crucial in supporting high potential and gifted students with access to industry-level learning environments. Similarly, programs and ensembles run by the Arts Unit, help bring together students from diverse public schools to be mentored by leading music educators. Critically, both initiatives have more benefits for students living in Metropolitan Sydney. Large scale events such as State Music Camps, Schools Spectacular, PULSE Alive, StarStruck, Southern Stars and Capers provide Public School students from regional, rural and remote areas intensive delivery of extra-curricular music learning opportunities. Regional Conservatoriums also play a significant role in providing access to music instruction that schools alone cannot provide. Of particular note is the Regional Conservatorium’s “State Youth Orchestra” initiative, in partnership with the Australian World Orchestra, which gives regional students access to performance opportunities which they would not otherwise have access to.

Despite music’s significant benefits to adolescent development and the role it has in the lives of young people, attrition rates for elective music in stages 5 and 6 are significant (Rogerson, 2021). The steepest decline in participation occurs between Stage 4 and 5 with 85% choosing other

subjects. ASME NSW attest that the lack of continuous music education in primary school years may be a contributing factor. A further 44% of students choose not to continue into Stage 6. These statistics mirror trends internationally, yet NSW still holds the highest percentage of students completing senior music courses nationally (Rogerson, 2021). This underscores the need to advocate a culturally relevant music education that responds to the interests, needs and strengths of students. Further case studies of schools with higher levels of involvement would be useful in the development of a strategy for increasing access and participation in music education (White, 2021).

Approximately 7% of NSW students study HSC Music Courses. These courses provide students with some authentic learning experiences, particularly in the fields of performance and notated composition. Of the three courses available, Music 1 provides the vast majority of enrolments. This course is highly valued by staff and students for its flexibility, with students able to select elective topics and modes of learning relevant to their interests. The Music 2 course has a more rigid structure, with a focus on Western Art Music and has historically provided students with preparation for further musical study at a tertiary level. This course, along with Music Extension scales particularly well for ATAR calculations, encouraging higher achieving students to continue studying music. However, Music 2 and Music Extension are not always able to be offered at all NSW High Schools. The Music 2 and Extension courses also have the highest mean socio-economic status among students, highlighting the significant disparity and inequity of access (Roberts et al., 2021). This emphasises the considerable financial burden associated with 'formal' music education pathways, which frequently necessitate expensive external music tuition. It is worth noting that the senior curriculum is currently undergoing its first comprehensive review in two decades. This presents a crucial opportunity to align the syllabus with recent advancements in the music industry and the increasingly diverse tertiary education landscape.

While ASME NSW acknowledges the strengths in secondary curricular music there is significant room for further growth. This can be achieved through ensuring revisions to senior syllabi continue to respond to developing understandings of quality music education. Music educators must also be supported with additional and ongoing professional learning to effectively provide culturally responsive, student-centred, and industry relevant learning experiences for their students.

Barriers to Secondary Music Education

Teacher Burn-out

Research shows that music teachers are particularly prone to burn-out due to the extra responsibilities and expectations placed on them by their schools (Hanson, 2021; Öztürk & Öztürk, 2020). In addition to allocated workloads, music teachers are often expected to coordinate co-curricular ensembles, school events and in some cases administrate teams of peripatetic staff providing additional tuition to students (Robinson, 2021). While these activities significantly enrich learning opportunities for students and broader school culture, this needs to be properly accounted for in the development of teacher workloads.

Recommendation: Mandate an equitable teaching allocation loading for each co-curricular ensemble activity that a music teacher takes at the request of the school.

Designation of Music as a Practical Class

One barrier identified by our members was classroom music not being identified as a “practical class”. This presents significant work-health and safety issues, particularly for students hypersensitive to noise in poorly designed classrooms. A reduction in class sizes in line with other “practical” courses would lead to stronger student engagement, a safer and more inclusive learning environment, and more equitable resource access for authentic music making experiences. Furthermore, equipping teachers and students with adequate resources (i.e. musical instruments, music technology and acoustically safe classrooms) for a dynamic, industry-centred, work ready experience is a challenge in many schools. There are major differences between access to resources from school to school.

***Recommendation:** Classify music as a "practical" course to support student engagement, safety, and equitable resource access, such as enabling the submission of audio-only, non-scored compositions in senior music courses.*

The Current State of Tertiary Education in NSW

Music enrolments have continued to grow across tertiary institutions in NSW. A key trend in the past 20 years has been the emergence of private institutions offering further music study across a range of disciplines. The large majority of private institutions have focused on supporting pathways into contemporary music, leading more diverse participation in the tertiary sector. Responding to this increase in competition (and opportunities for profit), universities such as the Sydney Conservatorium of Music have broadened their degree choices to include contemporary music practice, music theatre, composition for creative industries and digital music. Unsurprisingly these are the fastest growing areas within the state’s largest tertiary music school. Elsewhere, universities in metropolitan and regional areas are facing financial pressures leading to staff cuts and consolidation of courses. Mirroring trends across the university sector, the delivery of tertiary music is heavily casualised. Similarly, universities are favouring the employment of education-focused roles, limiting the ability of music educators to research and lead the generation of new ideas and thinking. Financial pressures have also led to some tertiary institutions removing or significantly limiting individualised instrumental tuition from their degrees.

As ASME NSW is primarily concerned with Music Teacher Education, our comments will focus upon ITE. Changes in tertiary learning pathways have slowly begun to impact systemic barriers to music teacher education. This has the potential to foster a more culturally and musically diverse community of teachers, mirroring the interests, needs and strengths of music students in different contexts (Fienberg, 2022). To further support equitable access to music teacher training, more financial support and scholarships are needed for pre-service teachers living in lower SES settings and under-represented communities, especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Initiatives such as The University of Sydney *My Sydney Scholars* program alongside greater opportunities to study music education in regional universities and utilising technology and online outreach programs to support teachers and students in remote locations (Schiavio et al., 2020) will further diversify the music teaching workforce.

Several institutions across the state offer music education ITE courses. The majority of these courses are at the level of a Master of Teaching, helping support students transition from the

completion of a Bachelor of Music, or equivalent degrees with a music major, into the teaching profession. In some institutions, students can access music education through undergraduate degrees. The Sydney Conservatorium of Music has a long-standing four-year Bachelor of Music (Music Education) degree, which uniquely provides its students with training across the K-12 curriculum. Critically, students complete placements in both primary and secondary contexts. Presently, all ITE music education degrees are only accredited for secondary music. This simultaneously discourages music teachers from working in primary settings and limits their ability for permanent employment in the public sector.

ITE degrees are subject to a rigorous accreditation process coordinated by NESA for AITSL. This helps ensure that all units of study are aligned with the Professional Teaching Standards, with each session mapped to contemporary research and evidence-based practices. Academics working in the higher education sector in NSW form part of a global network of scholars continuing to redefine what “evidence-based practice” means to music education. Such research has identified clear differences between evidence-based practices promoted by the NSW Department of Education and critical contemporary theory and philosophy within music education (Fuller, 2022; Humberstone & Fuller, 2022).

As previously discussed, it is difficult to argue that primary generalist pre-service teachers are provided with the equivalent robust and evidenced based music (and broader arts) training. Hours for arts-based education in primary ITE courses must be explicitly named and increased significantly. This approach would enhance pre-service educators' access to a wide range of pedagogical strategies, enabling them to effectively support music learners across diverse school contexts. By incorporating increased practical experience and mentoring opportunities, pre-service teachers would be better prepared for the realities of the classroom. Furthermore, developing robust, evidence-based music education courses at the tertiary level would be crucial. These courses should focus on equipping future teachers with the skills to cater to students with diverse abilities and experiences in music education (Bautista et al., 2018; Welch et al., 2020).

A recent initiative at the University of Sydney pairing pre-service music teachers with generalists in a mentoring program presents one possible strategy to strengthen teacher confidence through relationships with music specialists.

ASME NSW believes that long-term improvements to music education will be fundamentally driven through ITE. In addition to recommendations outlined earlier for creation of ITE and postgraduate pathways for primary music teacher accreditation, our members support the following recommendations to encourage greater access to ITE music training.

Barriers to Tertiary Music Education

The lack of tertiary music education degrees leading to a specialisation in primary music

The current lack of any specialised ITE in primary music education, is a significant barrier to establishing a workforce of highly qualified primary music educators. It is interesting to note that it is K-8 which is entitled to mandatory music education, however as mentioned earlier for the vast majority of NSW students, years 7 and 8 are the first time they will be taught by a specialist music teacher.

***Recommendation:** ASME NSW recommends the creation of postgraduate courses in primary music education to enable generalist teachers or secondary music specialists to gain additional accreditation as primary music specialists.*

Financial support for placements in regional NSW

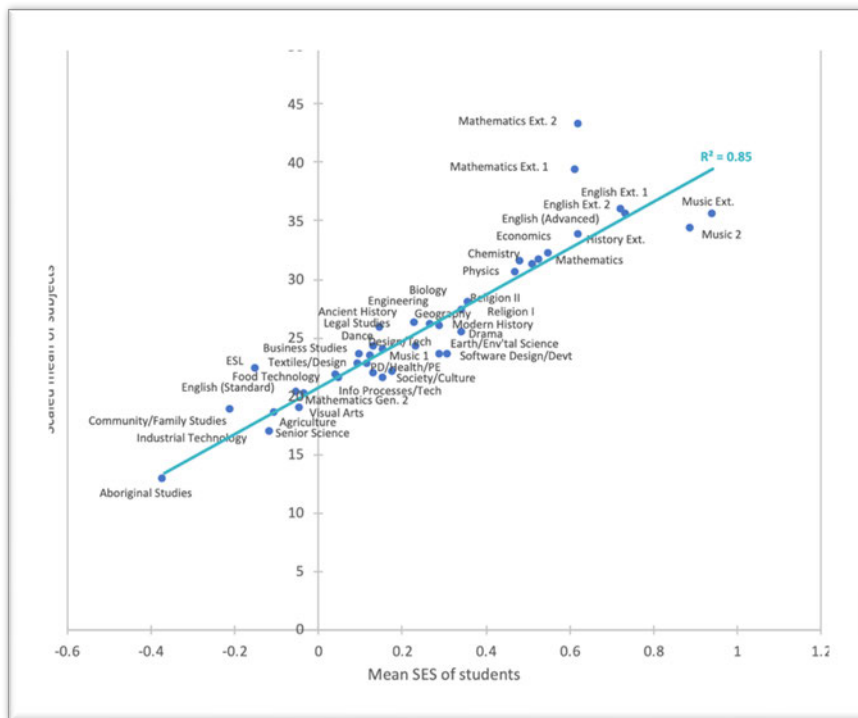
It is expensive for pre-service teachers to complete placements in regional/rural and remote schools. It is known that it is more difficult to access high quality music education in regional areas. One ASME NSW committee member reports driving one of her children to a town 110km away, every week for 7 years, in order to access tuition on their chosen instrument. Offering pre-service teachers incentives and scholarships to cover accommodation and living expenses for placements away from home would significantly enhance their professional development. This approach would provide a more comprehensive experience, broadening their perspective on educational environments. Moreover, it would encourage these future educators to consider non-metropolitan areas for permanent employment, addressing the critical need for qualified teachers in rural and remote regions. Such a strategy would not only benefit the individual teachers but also contribute to more equitable educational outcomes across diverse communities.

***Recommendation:** ASME NSW recommends increasing incentives and scholarships for pre-service music teachers to complete placements in regional/rural and remote schools, leading to permanent employment in non-metropolitan schools following graduation.*

The equity gap in music education

Whilst Music 2 and Extension are the least subscribed of the three HSC music courses, these students make up the vast majority of tertiary music education enrolments in NSW. Robert's 2019 report into the academic hierarchy gives a snapshot of exactly how powerful cultural capital can be in shaping the curriculum for students. This study correlated the SES of parents with the impact or 'powerfulness' of a subject in terms of contribution to a student's Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR). Within this context both Music 2 and Music Extension appear as some of the most powerful subjects in the Higher School Certificate (HSC), and some of the most inequitable subjects by a dramatic margin. (See figure 1).

Figure 1: NSW Curriculum Hierarchy (languages and vocational courses excluded). (Roberts, 2019).



The higher on the y axis a subject is the more powerful it is, the further to the right, the higher SES the student’s background is.

Interestingly, Music 1 is a far more average subject in terms of both ‘power’ and SES profile. Anecdotally it has been suggested that the reason for this is that the curriculum of Music 2 and Extension are focused upon art music. Art music generally requires individual tuition to execute well. Therefore, for a student to do well in either Music 2 or Extension, serious financial investment in a child’s music education is likely to have begun well before the child was even approaching high school. Music 1 however is a different matter: many self-taught musicians choose this subject and do well. An adept classroom teacher can bring these students through to a high level of achievement. These students also have valuable skills to bring to the music teaching workforce. ASME NSW attests that through increasing access to ITE to students from less privileged backgrounds and underrepresented communities will provide a great benefit to music education.

Recommendation: ASME NSW recommends increasing scholarships for pre-service music teachers from low SES settings and under-represented communities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Regional Conservatoriums

Regional conservatoriums and creative professionals provide an essential service in supporting high quality music education in regional/ rural and remote communities. In many regional towns they are the main provider of instrumental music tuition (Sattler & Mullen, 2022). Regional conservatoriums are seen as essential components of regional communities, promoting connectedness and well-being. In many regional communities, regional conservatoriums support school music programs through instrumental tuition programs, ensemble direction and mentoring of classroom music teachers. Some conservatoriums, support schools through targeted programs such

as the New England Conservatorium's Music and Literacy Project (2019), which not only promoted music education in remote New England central schools, but also supported other teaching priorities such as literacy.

Currently many regional conservatoriums, have difficulty attracting highly trained instrumental teachers, as it is difficult to maintain a performing career in regional NSW. For example, one NSW conservatorium lists 21 teachers, however only 11 of these teachers have tertiary music qualifications. This at times forms a barrier to conservatoriums being able to offer the full range of services to the community.

***Recommendation:** Develop targeted initiatives to attract and retain highly qualified instrumental music teachers in regional areas*

The efficacy of the current primary and secondary school curriculum in delivering learning outcomes in music related subjects

In response to the NSW Curriculum Reform, the music curriculum is undergoing its first significant renewal in two decades. The Creative Arts K-6 Syllabus has successfully completed two review stages, while the 7-10 Music Syllabus is set to be introduced in 2026, with senior syllabi currently under development. ASME NSW has expressed serious concerns regarding the Curriculum Review process, particularly the sequencing of syllabus updates and the lack of clarity regarding the overall music learning continuum from K-12. Additionally, the process has been criticized for its rushed nature and short consultation periods, which have been inconvenient for music educators.

The existing syllabi, established in 1999 for K-6, 2003 for 7-10, and 1999 for Music 1, Music 2, and Extension, were progressive for their time and aimed to provide comprehensive music education. Despite music being a mandatory subject for all children in Australia up to age 14, it is widely acknowledged that generalist primary school teachers often lack adequate training in music education (Hocking, 2023). Consequently, schools without the resources for a specialist music teacher face challenges in effectively delivering the curriculum.

Historically, the syllabi promoted an integrated approach to music learning through performing, composing, and listening, aligning with influential texts such as Music Matters (Elliott, 1995) and Musicking (Small, 1998). These works challenged traditional aesthetic approaches to music education, granting teachers significant autonomy to tailor their teaching to culturally responsive contexts.

However, while autonomy remains in the K-6 and Stage 4 Mandatory Course, the Stage 5 Elective Course and Music 2 syllabus impose stricter requirements. The current syllabi gives prominence to Western Art Music, justified by the rationale of preparing students for further study in tertiary institutions (NSW Board of Studies, 1999). Given the diversification of the tertiary music sector, there is a pressing need for a curriculum that reflects a broader range of musical styles and prepares students for various entry points into the music industry.

One notable strength of the current Stage 6 curriculum is the HSC Practical Examinations process, which is managed by a team of experienced educators. This process includes performance and musicology assessments, and the rigorous composition marking has significantly bolstered the

Australian art music industry. The upcoming curriculum presents an opportunity to enhance equitable access to composition through the introduction of an audio-only composition elective, aligning with industry practices across diverse musical contexts.

Despite a strong philosophical foundation and research support for a balanced approach to music education, significant challenges persist within the current curriculum. A significant issue is that many educators misinterpret the Elements of comprehensive musicianship (referred to as Concepts of Music in the current NSW curriculum) as the content to be taught, rather than a framework for understanding music. This misunderstanding often leads to an emphasis on verbal knowledge about music rather than practical engagement with music itself. This issue is particularly pronounced in Music 1, Music 2, and Extension, where the aural examination has resulted in an over-reliance on some textbooks that focus on concepts with minimal connection to musical repertoire.

The Masters Curriculum Review provides an opportunity for NSW to develop a leading K-12 continuum of music education. However, ASME NSW believes that the curriculum development process has been hindered by governmental pressure to focus on "content to be taught" rather than promoting active, integrated learning experiences.

The forthcoming 7-10 Music syllabus, scheduled for implementation in 2026, has introduced significant improvements. It now encompasses a broader range of musical cultures, mandating coverage of five repertoire categories: Music of Australia (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music), Art music, Jazz, Popular music, and Global music culture. This approach reflects current research and demonstrates a commendable consultative process (Fienberg, 2023a; 2023b; Webb & Bracknell, 2021).

The 2026 syllabus articulates aims that resonate with the principles of active engagement, enjoyment, and fostering a lifelong curiosity about music. Furthermore, it acknowledges the role of Digital Audio Workstations in composition, moving away from a sole focus on traditional notation.

While the emphasis on musical elements remains, the new syllabus has introduced a stronger contextual focus, addressing research that highlights the need for culturally relevant pedagogical approaches (Abril, 2013; Dunbar-Hall, 2004; Lind & McKoy, 2016). However, the separation of "music in context" from "music in practice" risks perpetuating outdated divisions between practical and theoretical music education. This separation represents a significant weakness in the new syllabus, which leans heavily towards verbal knowledge about music rather than embodied musical understanding. The inclusion of 56 content points in Stage 4 and 57 in Stage 5, with 19 out of 22 content points under "Listening" focused on verbal knowledge, further exacerbates this issue. Additionally, the shift from "Integrated Learning Experiences" to "Focus Areas" may deepen the divide between practical and theoretical aspects of music education, detracting from the encouragement for teachers to engage students in musical learning.

Moreover, the state government has not aligned the new syllabus with the national Australian Curriculum. While promotional materials claim an evidence-based approach, there is a lack of substantial research supporting the effectiveness of this syllabus in music education (Fuller, 2023).

The K-6 Creative Arts syllabus released July 24, 2024, continued the trend away from the integrated nature of the current syllabus. The alignment of the arts with other Key Learning Areas (KLAs) at times positions extraneous knowledge as key musical knowledge. For example, there will now be a requirement for Stage 1 students to engage with 'ancient music'. There is also a significant increase in content to be covered. This undermines teachers' ability to deliver culturally relevant music education that prioritizes students' interests, needs, and strengths.

***Recommendation:** ASME NSW recommends that all syllabi must have the flexibility to enable all teachers to design teaching and learning programs that are culturally relevant to local contexts prioritising students' interests, needs and strengths.*

***Recommendation:** ASME NSW recommends the reduction "content to be taught" in the incoming 7-10 and K-6 Creative Arts syllabus and a greater emphasis on active music learning.*

***Recommendation:** ASME NSW recommends more regular and transparent updating of music curricula to respond to international developments and increasingly diverse tertiary and industry pathways.*

The availability of support for teachers and principals in delivering quality music education and ensuring that an inclusive approach is taken towards resource allocation for regional schools across New South Wales

With long gaps in curriculum renewal, the need to support music teachers to deliver the music/creative arts curriculum has historically not been as pressing as other KLAs with more regular updating of syllabi. The NSW DoE has recently appointed a K-6 Creative arts curriculum team and a 7-12 Creative arts curriculum team which includes subject matter experts in Music. This is in response to the recent curriculum reform, providing significant support for Music teachers statewide. Each team provides music specific curriculum resources and professional learning to teachers across all sectors including those in rural, remote and regional areas. Actions to address identified barriers by the NSW DoE include professional learning delivered online in real time and through self-paced online models to ensure that the professional learning is available to all teachers state-wide. Resources are housed on a public facing website and teachers and schools can contact the Creative arts curriculum teams at any time for curriculum support. The statewide staffroom has also been developed for NSW DoE teachers as a platform to share ideas, ask questions and receive and provide support. This meets the NSW Public education goal of delivering outstanding leadership, teaching and learning through the provision of high-quality, evidence-based curriculum resources. Curriculum resource support is also delivered within equivalent AIS and Catholic sectors through the delivery of Professional Learning courses and conferences as NESAs Authorised Providers.

Music has a proliferation of professional associations which offer music teachers specialised support for implementing extra-curricular programs (i.e. ABODA and ANCA) and along pedagogical lines (i.e. Orff NSW and Kodaly NSW). Both Orff and Kodaly offer opportunities to extend their knowledge through differentiated levels for primary and secondary teachers. ASME NSW is the broadest representative professional association, offering teachers with diverse exposure to strategies relevant to different contexts across the state. ASME NSW has placed an increased focus towards providing online Professional Learning and recording in-person sessions for later viewing

through ASME's website. This helps ensure that teachers in regional, rural and remote areas have equal access to support. Another strength of training delivered by professional associations is the ability to bring together people from across sectors to collaborate. It is important that associations such as ASME NSW continue to be NESA Authorised Providers to enable easier access and support from principals to attend sessions led by leading subject experts.

The primary resource allocation needed in regional schools is sustainable access to music teachers. Our members have suggested that there is a need for greater incentives for music teachers to work in these communities. Providing support for pre-service teachers to complete placements and internships in regional schools is a key factor in graduates taking up opportunities to move into the regions.

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

There are many examples of collaboration between the creative industries and the education system. Music is embedded within two key VET courses delivered by ASME NSW members. VET Entertainment Industry is aligned with a Certificate III in Live Production and Services. This course is incredibly beneficial as it provides students with the requisite training to coordinate live events, such as school concerts, musicals and speech days. Similarly, VET Music Industry provides students a Certificate II and job-ready skills in music performance, music creation and composition, sound production and music business. Both VET courses mandate work placements which provide invaluable connections between industry schools.

Unfortunately, VET Music Industry is ATAR ineligible, which detracts many students from taking this industry specific unit. To address this ASME NSW suggests that content from this course (specifically music creation and sound production) should be embedded into the Music 1 and Music 2 courses. We view this as a more beneficial option than creating an ATAR pathway for the VET Music Industry course.

***Recommendation:** ASME NSW recommends embedding aspects of the VET Music Industry course within Stage 6 music courses to help increase industry relevance and employability.*

There is a long history of collaboration with the creative industries to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student engagement and connection to culture. First Nations hip hop artists, including Wire MC and MunkiMark have simultaneously straddled the worlds of industry and education as part of their community obligations (Clapham & Kelly, 2019). Through workshops, they have focused on using songwriting as a vehicle for self-expression and cultural connection. [Desert Pea Media](#) has been a leading organisation supporting the creation of music videos in school settings. Such workshops can have long lasting impacts when they are delivered in collaboration with music teachers, rather than in isolation. This helps boost the cultural confidence of staff to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives across the curriculum.

ASME NSW Vice Chair, Dr Thomas Fienberg has documented the impact of collaboration with First Nations community and industry professionals (Fienberg 2023a; 2023b; Fienberg & Higgison, 2022). Through the Solid Ground program, supported by Carriageworks and Blacktown Arts, several Greater Sydney High Schools have engaged in weekly mentoring sessions with artists

such as Thelma Plum, Emma Donovan, Marcus Corowa, DOBBY, Tessa Thames, Brendon Boney, Monks and Izzy. In contrast to some of the aforementioned “one-off” workshops, students build significantly stronger relationships with artists and are incredibly well supported by a team of First Nations administrators who lead the program. Students work towards the generation of creative outputs that are constructed in collaboration with local knowledge holders and Elders. Beyond engagement in school settings, the program offers First Nations internship programs with leading arts organisations. This has led to many students commencing arts-based training through NAISDA, the National Arts School and tertiary music degrees.

There are many other external providers collaborating with schools such as, APRA AMCOS Songmakers and Musica Viva in Schools. These programs are particularly effective when linked with curriculum structures and can provide students with engaging and inspiring workshops with culturally diverse musicians.

***Recommendation:** ASME NSW recommends additional government funding and incentives to connect First Nations creative artists with schools.*

Measures of success in music education

This report has outlined numerous measures of success in music education. Fundamentally, ASME NSW believes that the primary measures of success are access and participation:

- Access to qualified and well-trained music teachers for the delivery of curriculum in primary and secondary contexts.
- Equitable access to resources for music teaching across school systems and geographical locations.
- Access and sustained participation with curricular music beyond the 7-8 mandatory course.
- Equitable access to participation in further music education, measured by matching and exceeding population parity for diverse and underrepresented communities (prioritising Aboriginal and Torres Islander Peoples)

ASME NSW notes that success is contextually dependent, and driven by local needs, interests and strengths. This underscores the need for curriculum to be culturally responsive and for teachers to be adequately trained to make the most of this flexibility.

***Recommendation:** ASME NSW recommends targets for increasing the number of accredited music specialists working in primary schools. This can only be achieved through government funding to enable existing staff to complete further training in universities.*

***Recommendation:** ASME recommends targets and KPIs for the employment of qualified music teachers in high ICSEA, regional, rural and remote communities.*

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

As previously discussed, there are numerous opportunities for students to engage with further music education in the tertiary and TAFE sectors. The diversity of entry points will enable many students to find courses that complement their interests, needs and skills. It is fundamentally important that regional universities and TAFE providers continue to provide access music education

to enable students to stay better connected with place and help contribute to the musical life of a community.

A major barrier to accessing several institutions is the reliance on expensive, ongoing instrumental tuition to meet entry requirements. Beyond the obvious financial inequity, this presents a significant challenge for students living in areas without access to suitably qualified and experienced tutors. The DoE arts unit and regional conservatorium network has the potential to address this disadvantage by providing online tuition/masterclasses to students with an interest in further tertiary study. This would augment support provided by the Distance Education schools (Tsui, 2022).

***Recommendation:** ASME NSW recommends additional funding for regional conservatoriums and the DoE's Arts Unit to provide free online tuition/masterclasses for students interested in further music education.*

While there is a proliferation of institutions providing further education in contemporary music, there are significant weaknesses in the current Stage 6 curriculum meeting the needs of people engaging in creative industries. These must be addressed in the current curriculum process to provide a more industry-relevant experience for NSW students. Increased consultation with tertiary institutions in the process is needed to address this. This aligns with one of the earlier recommendations.

***Recommendation:** ASME NSW recommends more regular and transparent updating of music curricula to respond to international developments and increasingly diverse tertiary and industry pathways.*

Notable approaches to music education in other jurisdictions

To address this term of reference, the committee should commission a literature review conducted by leading music education researchers in NSW to document best practice locally and internationally.

***Recommendation:** ASME NSW recommends funding for a literature review to investigate and evaluate notable approaches to music education in other states and OECD countries.*

Conclusion

ASME NSW is grateful for the opportunity to submit our ideas to this Parliamentary Inquiry. We cannot overstate how important we feel it is to elevate music education in NSW to a position of greater importance within the NSW curriculum. We have a vision for a continuous, sequential, culturally relevant musical education for every child in NSW, regardless of education sector, location or SES.

In conclusion, to truly realise the potential of music education, we must recognise its power to nurture creativity, foster emotional intelligence, and enhance cognitive development. A robust music curriculum can serve as a catalyst for personal growth, cultural understanding, and social

cohesion. As we move forward, it is imperative that we champion the cause of music education, advocating for its rightful place at the heart of a well-rounded curriculum.

By investing in music education today, we are investing in the future of our society – one that is more creative, empathetic, and culturally rich. Let us seize this opportunity to transform music education in NSW, ensuring that every student has access to high-quality musical experiences that will resonate throughout their lives.

This report has been prepared on behalf of ASME NSW Members, by Debra Batley (ASME NSW Chair), Dr Thomas Fienberg (ASME NSW Vice Chair) and Dr Kirsten Macaulay (ASME NSW Treasurer) and Alex Manton (ASME NSW Committee Member).

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