

Submission  
No 54

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

**Organisation:** Hume Conservatorium of Music Ltd

**Date Received:** 25 July 2024

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25 July 2024

## SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON ARTS AND MUSIC EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN NEW SOUTH WALES

### Focus of this submission

In this submission, the Hume Conservatorium of Music<sup>1</sup> (HumeCon) will focus on clause “b” of the terms of reference that apply directly to us as a music education institution, concentrating on our experience as a regional provider of education. We note there will be a submission by the Association of NSW Regional Conservatoriums (the Association) and intend to supplement not replicate their submission. This submission is mainly relevant to sub-clauses b (i), (ii), (iv), (vi) to (viii) and (x) of the terms of reference, with a focus on our experience as a regional provider and our interaction as a community-based charity with other elements of the music education sector, and with the music industry more generally.

### Introduction and Summary

The HumeCon appreciates this opportunity to make a submission. We welcome the Joint Select Committee’s (“the Committee”) enquiry and the breadth of its terms of reference.

As the Government’s consultation on cultural policy in 2023 amply demonstrated, cultural education and the maintenance of cultural industries are closely linked. There are many industries which are now reliant on imported skills and workforce. Our identity and cultural expression are not capable of being imported, which makes it critical that this type of inquiry is periodically undertaken.

Our current education systems have less focus on musical education than international comparators, and musical skills development is very dependent on private funding – both in schools and generally. Consideration should be given to enhancing our educational objectives in order to maintain a skilled and successful music industry.

Regional Conservatoriums play a key role in their communities, and the Regional Conservatorium Grant Program (RCGP) has many desirable features. Nonetheless it is capable of improvement. Policy ownership could be strengthened, funding consideration for population and activity growth addressed, and geographic coverage could be improved.

Similarly, infrastructure provision and maintenance funding requires consideration as neither the RCGP nor the Education Department (the Department) manage or support Conservatorium infrastructure.

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<sup>1</sup> Hume Conservatorium of Music Ltd. ABN 53 635 556 875.

The current spending per child through the RCGP is well below what could provide widespread access to music education in regional NSW, even in a basic form. The funding model requires updating for activity levels and consideration needs to be given to funding for low socioeconomic communities/families.

### About Hume Conservatorium

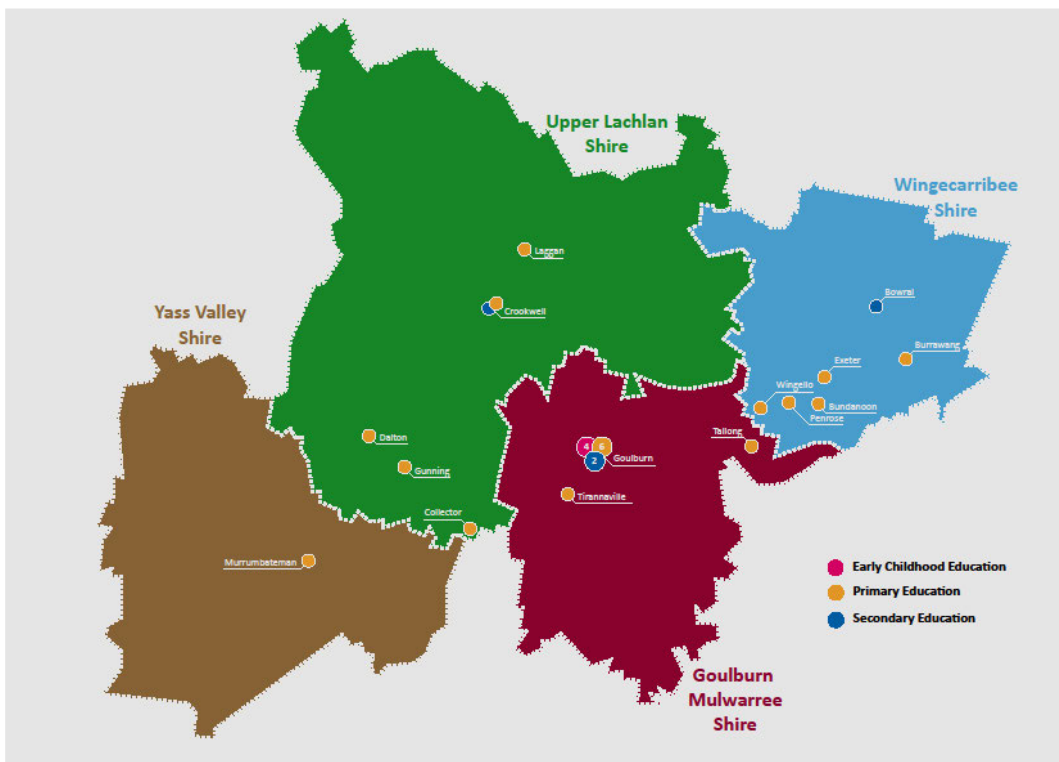
The HumeCon is not-for-profit educational charity, and the centre for music education in the Southern Tablelands and Southern Highlands of NSW. Based in Goulburn, we were founded in 1985, and we are a founding member of the ANSWRC. We are participants in the NSW Government’s Regional Conservatoriums Program (RCGP) which provides part funding to underpin our operations, with the majority of our funding sourced through fees paid by student families, schools, community groups such as parent and citizen committees, and early childhood centres. We also receive occasional grants from other government agencies and private charitable bodies.

HumeCon is a regional community of musicians which aims to educate, inspire, connect and enrich our community through the power of music and creativity. We offer accessible music programs for all ages and abilities from infancy to old age. We teach all genres of music, including individual or group lessons, early childhood music, in-schools lessons and classroom activities. We offer groups and ensembles for students and the community. We are embedded in our communities, and our presence enriches the lives of our students and the community. We aim to be the trusted go-to provider and enabler of quality music education.

We operate within a 100km radius of Goulburn, and have staff who can provide tuition in three of the four LGAs adjacent to Goulburn.

Outside Goulburn, we operate through agreements with schools, although in future shopfronts may be possible. Diagram 1 shows the distribution of sites in which we operate across the region.

DIAGRAM 1



The following table sets out a snapshot of current enrolments and tuition provision across the regions in which we operate. These figures are for all ages.

Table 1: Enrolments- July 2024

Tuition/enrolment type	Total	Remarks
Individual <u>Students</u> through the Conservatorium	433	Delivery at the conservatorium or at schools
Tuition <u>enrolments</u> through the Conservatorium	330	
Group/Ensemble <u>enrolments</u> through the Conservatorium	179	
Classroom <u>students</u> through schools	600	At schools
Early Music Education <u>students</u> – delivery at conservatorium and through centres	161	On site or at early childhood centres
<b>Total persons</b>	<b>1194</b>	

### Progress towards a long-term goal of quality music education

The first point to make is: “*why should quality musical education be a long-term goal not a current expectation?*”.

More specifically, the following framework sets out our thinking about the necessary objectives for music teaching, followed by commentary on the current state.

At HumeCon we think of our teaching roles in these three ways - exposure to music education, developing and demonstrating musical skills/talent and preparing for a career/tertiary education.

**Exposure:** Every child should be exposed to music education through their schooling, develop a degree of musical literacy and the ability to participate in community music making at some level.

Our education system aims to deliver this and there is some degree of success, but access and achievement are neither universal nor consistent. In various ways, comparable countries<sup>2</sup> invest significantly more resources in music education – in both delivery and in specialised teacher training - than we do in Australia.

**Development:** Children showing distinct interest and/or ability should have the opportunity to pursue further learning and demonstrate potential for a professional music career (performance, teaching, scholarship).

We do not have State-based education systems which are designed to deliver this. The Catholic system in Sydney, through the Amadeus program, is an example of an attempt to provide universal access. And private schools more generally embed this phase in their offering – typically with additional fees.

<sup>2</sup> Brief references: other jurisdictions

- The European Association for Music in Schools: [Countries | European Association for Music in Schools \(eas-music.org\)](https://eas-music.org)
- this US summary of teaching practices for music from the Give a Note foundation: [The-Status-of-Music-Education-in-US-Public-Schools-2017\\_reduced.pdf \(giveanote.org\)](https://www.giveanote.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/The-Status-of-Music-Education-in-US-Public-Schools-2017-reduced.pdf).
- The European Council for Music’s Agenda for Music [Education & Access to Music | European Agenda for Music](https://www.ecm-council.org/education-access-to-music/)

Overall, those with financial capacity can access development opportunities. Others with outstanding talent may sometimes come to notice and succeed. In regional areas, Conservatoriums fulfil the need to have some access to skill development which in major centres is met by creative and performing arts schools. But in all cases, this is predominantly for and by those with the means to pay for it. For student families, attendance at a selective/performing arts school would require relocation to another city or boarding. As a result of these factors, many who have motivation and potential never get to test it.

Apart from identifying those with career potential, this phase of learning has proven and widespread benefits for students and the community. The enduring benefits of music education are well understood, and we will not reiterate them here.

**Advanced skills and career preparation:** Those with demonstrated potential and capacity should be able to prepare for further education and compete for professional careers.

Realistically, the highly skilled professional careers for musicians are limited – but even this limited need is not currently being met. Our educational systems (including the Conservatorium network) can deliver learning and development opportunities, but while levels 1 and 2 are only partially achieved, the development of advanced skills is constrained.

## The Regional Conservatorium Program (RCGP)

We expect that the ANSWRC will focus in detail on this area and will therefore endeavour to avoid undue duplication.

### Strengths of the RCGP

The RCGP has some notable strengths which underpin and support music education in NSW.

- There has been long term funding and stability within trienniums.
  - In our case, the continuity of Conservatoriums has embedded us in the community and enabled a richer cultural life in addition to our educational delivery.
  - Our employment of around 35 local musicians, while largely casual or part time, provides a significant resource of skills which contribute to community life and help to sustain creative industry and practice.
- The community focus of the program concentrates funding where there is support and demand from potential users of the program. Community-based staffing and delivery is more responsive to local needs, and we can access small communities which would otherwise be deprived of any support. In our case, we try to cover a 100km radius – operating in 3 of the 4 sub-regions around us.
- There is flexibility within in the program to focus on areas relevant to the needs and demand in a particular region
- There is some logistical and coordination support from the Department of Education (the Department)
- The overarching ANSWRC structure is broadly effective, if largely voluntary.

### Potential Improvements the RCGP

- The Department could and should take up a role as a proponent, developer and influencer of the policy settings for the RCGP as part of the overall state education system. Presently this role rests with the ANSWRC.
- Program design would be enhanced if program coverage throughout regional areas was actively pursued and funded.
- The relationship between the RCGP program recipients and State schools should be strengthened.
  - Primary schools do not have a budget for engaging music teachers or Conservatoriums, and discretionary funds are very limited, yet Conservatorium program funding is insufficient to enable free services, even in disadvantaged communities.
  - Conservatoriums should be endorsed providers, even if there is a need to compete for business. Presently, there is no requirement for schools in regions to even consider engaging our services.
- Consideration of appropriate infrastructure should be addressed. Neither the RCGP nor the Department more generally address the provision or maintenance of conservatorium infrastructure. In our case we own our 120-year-old building.
  - Our inability to assure compliance with contemporary building code requirements is a risk to our continued operation and limits our ability to serve community needs. For example, we cannot meet contemporary access requirements or fire safety standards, let alone provide heating and cooling.
  - Our primary role is to deliver education, yet we must devote significant time and resources to managing ageing infrastructure.
- The Program receives some adjustment for inflation, but the base funding pool has not been addressed for activity levels and population growth for many years.

**DIAGRAM 2**

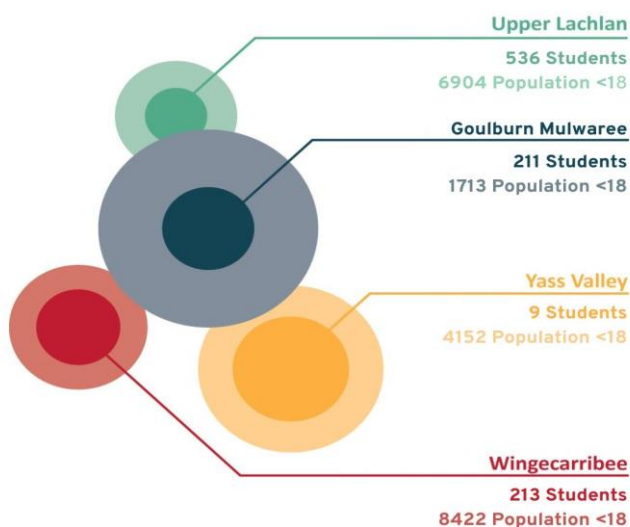


Diagram 2 shows total enrolments under eighteen years of age and total student populations for the regions in which we operate. These numbers include early childhood, primary and secondary school ages<sup>3</sup>. This diagram therefore reflects involvement with the school age communities in which we operate.

<sup>3</sup> ABS Data from the 2021 census via: <https://profile.id.com.au/goulburn/service-age-groups> ; [2021 Wingecarribee, Census All persons QuickStats | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/2021/Wingecarribee_Census/All-persons-QuickStats)

In our region, our present RCGP funding would fund.

- under 30 mins of individual tuition per State school child per annum, or
- around 2 group lessons per annum, or
- around 1 classroom learning session per week for a trimester.

None of these options effectively support skills development or the maintenance of amateur music-making, let alone a music industry.

Specific data for State students is as follows:

- When supplemented with fees, we provide 2.1% of our region's State students with personalised tuition and 6.5% of private school students<sup>4</sup>. We believe this disparity reflects the relative wealth of the different school communities and their capacity to pay fees.
- 15% of State Primary students in our region receive classroom education. No secondary or private school students receive classroom education.

### The level and status of music education

HumeCon's experience in regional primary school music is limited to those schools who may have teachers with music skills or interests, or schools in wealthier areas (or private schools with wealthier parents) who can privately fund music teachers/access to our programs.

Regional schools have student populations from under twenty to several hundred. Only the largest can consider a full-time music teacher. An itinerant Conservatorium teacher can bridge this gap, and we can also provide on-site individual, or group tuition funded by school families, on top of whatever the school contracts us to provide. But regional and smaller schools need to be able to fund the cost of travel time and expenses, as well as the cost of teaching hours.

Secondary schools build on skills and knowledge acquired at primary level. As discussed earlier, without strong primary foundations, there are limits to what can be achieved educationally. Secondary schools have dedicated teaching staff, who may or may not have music performance degrees – many do but the numbers are declining. Teachers do as much as they can but cannot offer wide ranging musical education across the many instruments and styles. As teachers move, what can be supported within the school will also change. Conservatoriums can expand on what the school can support at a local level - although similar funding issues exist in secondary schools as primary schools. Student and parental interest and capacity to pay are a strong influence on whether students can continue to learn and how much they can achieve.

At both levels, there is a reliance on parents and citizen groups, wind farm trusts/community foundations or charities to fund State music education. Unsurprisingly, music education access is patchy, and this limits the proven benefits of music education across the community in areas such as literacy, numeracy, behaviour and wellbeing. Schools who engage the local Conservatoriums often have higher rates of attendance, and students continue to talk about the program long after the funding has run out.

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<sup>4</sup> Source: Hume Con data and [Open data \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://open.data.nsw.gov.au). Private boarding schools have been excluded.



Case Study: program access and continuity

Michael attended Goulburn primary school and was part of the conservatorium strings program which was funded through a grant from a private foundation for a 2-year program. During 2024 a program was run at Hume Conservatorium for aboriginal children in high school. Michael attended this single-week free program and it was the first access to music education since being in the strings program in year 2. The desire to continue to play music was still strong. Tragically, Michael's family wasn't able to access the program due to living in low socio-economic circumstances and the school access to music education was funding dependent. His tuition could not be sustained after the program funding completed.

\*Names have been changed.

## The role of conservatorium and music professionals in music education

We employ a range of teachers, most are sessional (casual) as there is insufficient school-based work to provide full-time hours. Teachers with the ability to teach multiple instruments are more likely to be offered 20 or more hours per week as they can attract more in-school students in addition to any classroom work.

- Our teachers therefore tend to have portfolio careers- involving bands, performances and other creative collaborations in addition to their teaching with us. This results in programs through the Conservatorium which are relevant and industry informed.
- In our contemporary music program, it is a specific objective that our strongest students will be in bands and performing in the community – with the ability to obtain and manage gigs – by the time they finish year 12.
- In other cases, students are exposed to performance opportunities and local musicians because our teachers are embedded in the cultural life of the community.
- We support tertiary study for music performance through a partnership with the University of New England. Students study on these online/remotely with UNE and complete their performance subjects through study at our conservatorium. This partnership contributes to maintaining musicians in regions and assists in staff recruitment.

## Support for teachers

Support for teachers is limited in many ways

- There are few specific budgets and a high degree of reliance on Parent & Citizen Associations and philanthropy/grants
- There is undue dependence at primary level on whatever music skills or background 1 or 2 staff may have:
- Primary teacher training in music teaching is severely limited- often 1 subject in 1 semester; and
- Secondary teachers are more limited by time than ability, although as noted, no teacher can teach everything at a secondary skill level.



## Industry coordination

Collaboration is intrinsic to how regional communities work. So, for the most part, local industry exposure looks out for itself. Exposure to non-local and higher-level professional skills and practice requires funding. At present, much of this activity is not affordable/accessible for families away from major cities. Wealthier families are often able to give children those opportunities.

Some programs are notable exceptions-

- The APRA/AMCOS Songmakers program is a good example of a successful program which is regionally accessible, as are a number of Regional Arts programs which sometimes address music.
- Holiday Programs funded through the Office of Regional Youth can also build these linkages, but the level of funding limits what can be delivered, and supplementary fees for those who can afford it are prohibited.
- Some regional touring programs- such as the Australian Opera and Sydney Symphony build in local engagement into their programs, and this is a very valuable extension of what regional organisations can provide.

Commercial touring artists' regional schedules often make this difficult in practice, although often there is willingness to "give back". Dependence on touring artist volunteerism is of course a limitation. Fees are increasingly expected especially since other work (e.g. festivals) is declining.

Local government support and strategic planning for the cultural economy is important, but not often present. As noted in the Cultural Policy consultations, Councils can play a critical role in providing performance and workshop infrastructure for their communities. In Goulburn, we are also keen to see implementation of support for the night-time economy, and increased prominence of cultural and educational policy in Council strategic planning.

## Learning business skills

Hume Conservatorium prides itself on holistic approaches to music education offering industry focused skills and training. Local and regional partnerships create performance opportunities for regional, touring and travelling musicians as well as opportunities for young and emerging musicians to perform through partnered organisations such as festivals and community-based clubs.

Hume Conservatorium was also part of the working party with Goulburn Mulwaree Council with the Live Music office to help create more performance opportunities for young musicians as part of the Nighttime economy program. Access to vocational opportunities is an essential part of the music education program for emerging musicians who have been part of the music education programs at the Conservatorium.

### Case Study: Senior Rock Band. The Slightly Deranged Monkeys.

The group has been studying in individual lessons from mid primary school and were formed into the band in 2021 as part of our rock band program. During the two years of the program our teachers and mentors taught them stagecraft, sound and lighting and the independence of setting up, working together and performing to audiences, through performance practices and concerts. They also formed a committed part of our youth leaders program creating events for young people living in the region. Participants have proceeded to form new bands including country music, blues and folk and developed their skills in performance, management and event management. Students in the rock bands program have also taken part in the APRA AMCOS Songmakers program through Hume Conservatorium as well as a grant funded songwriting camp to create original Australian music to perform and record.

## International approaches

While not expert in this area, HumeCon notes some common features internationally, based on the references provided in footnote 1.

A three-tiered education system is common.

- The lowest level up to year 5 or 6 focuses on fundamental skills, awareness, expression, creation and exposure. Teachers may be generalists or specialists. Where specialists are not employed, teachers generally receive significant training in music education.
- The middle level corresponding with upper primary/lower secondary often concentrates on both broader and deeper experience, including more use of instrumental learning, stronger theory and, increased exposure to critical analysis and theoretical learning. Both historical and contemporary music can be emphasised. Teachers will generally be specialists with both tertiary music and education qualifications.
- The upper level (corresponding to around years 10-12 in our system) is often elective and specialised, with multiple contact hours per week with theoretical and practical requirements, preparing for further study. Specialist teachers undertake the teaching.

Partnership with local cultural institutions is often expected, and the importance of industry interaction is emphasised.

A common feature is that there is a significantly higher expectation for music education contact hours. The integration of more intensive education in “middle school” years is an approach with real merit. In Australia we are highly reliant on fee based private tuition for the development of core instrumental skills and theoretical knowledge to underpin learning for industry/professional careers.

A stronger focus on (probably elective) education in late primary/early secondary would strengthen what the secondary school system can deliver for students and enable better leveraging of the current investment levels.

## Concluding Remarks

The decline in music education does not arise by chance- it is a product of education choices and priorities. It is also a product of economic circumstances and the globalisation of entertainment. The underlying question for any society is whether to become cultural consumers or instead to retain creative skills such as music. This is not a question of elitism - in which certain musical forms or sectors are privileged - but whether in our society the ability to make or perform music will be common. Already, in many families, there is no one with these skills. It is a stark decline from the past.

George Brenan  
Chief Executive  
On behalf of the Hume Conservatorium of Music Ltd.