

Submission
No 78

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

Organisation: New England Conservatorium of Music

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To: Joint Select Committee on Arts and Music Education and Training in NSW

The New England Conservatorium (NECOM) welcomes the inquiry into the Arts and Music Education and Training and the opportunity to provide input from both a music education and regional perspective.

The New England Conservatorium of Music (NECOM) is one of 17 regional conservatoria across NSW that provides programs for lifelong music education and access to classical music performances. NECOM is founded on the belief that high-quality music education and music performance embedded in a regional community gives it unique cohesion, economic, and social capacity. A significant contributor to the identity of Armidale and the New England, the Conservatorium delivers 29,000 hours of classroom, ensemble and instrumental programs each year through a unique 'Conservatorium without Walls' model connecting 7500 students across the Northern Tablelands. It is also the largest employer of music educators and musicians in northern NSW, providing employment to over 70 salaried and contract staff and visiting musicians/ educators each year.

All the NSW Regional Conservatoriums provide significant educational and socio-economic benefits to the New England and north west communities of NSW. The Regional Conservatoriums network in NSW is the envy of other states less fortunate and ensures some parity of accessibility to music performance and education opportunities for regional and remote communities compared to those living in metropolitan centres.

The systemic decline in music education is a direct result of inequitable resourcing in STEM at the expense of the arts. It is the arts which enrich a community and create connections which are so important to small communities. The reappropriation of resources away from the arts has led to the systemic decline in Music Education from Primary to Tertiary. The benefits of a music education are well documented and contribute, not only to the arts but to individual qualities and skills which are highly valued by employers. Musicians have a deep sense of professionalism and develop an autonomy and self-direction through their training. Musicians are excellent collaborators which make them outstanding team workers. A music education develops an analytical mind, with attention to detail.

The current training programs at tertiary level, which surely should be equipping students for a variety of careers in music education are woefully inadequate. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, the slow decline of funding for tertiary music programs has forced the tertiary sector to reduce the quality and breadth of delivery in their courses. Secondly, the staggering increase in HECS costs for arts degrees will discourage student enrolments and therefore the next generation of musicians and music teachers. These factors have a flow on affect to Secondary and Primary music education with lack of specialist teachers needed to deliver the curriculum and therefore these enriching experiences for our students. The frightening thing is that we are already seeing the results of this lack of government strategy with the 'generalisation' of the music curriculum in both the proposed NSW K-6 and 7-10 syllabi.

The breadth of activity of the New England Conservatorium has grown exponentially over the past 20 years, far beyond the incremental increases in funding. It is becoming increasingly difficult to attract quality music educators from metropolitan centres. Expectations of wage growth are unable to be achieved, particularly when expectations have been raised by the recent increase in salaries for NSW teachers' which Regional Conservatoria cannot match.

There has not been a review into funding for Regional Conservatoria for over 10 years despite the incredible growth in our delivery and in the case of NECOM, being the largest employer of music teachers in northern NSW and being the primary music educator in our region. Current cuts within the Education Sector mean less funds are available for schools to buy-in the services of Regional Conservatoriums.

Compounding this, the current cost of living crisis has created an inequitable situation which puts the onus on the individual's ability to pay for music education.

In conclusion, urgent action is required to reverse the decline in music education from Primary to Tertiary. This requires a change in the government's arts strategy and in the curriculum to ensure the parity of the Arts with STEM.

NSW Regional Conservatoria are critical to a vibrant arts and education sector that is equitable and reflects Australia's depth and diversity. They are critical players in training, educating and enriching their communities across NSW through music. However Regional Conservatoria need adequate investment to enable them to be part of the solution.

Kind regards,

Corinne Arter | CEO
New England Conservatorium of Music