

Submission
No 79

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

Organisation: Heaps Decent

Date Received: 25 July 2024

Submission to the inquiry into and report on arts and music education and training in New South Wales.

25/07/2024

To the Committee Members,

I am submitting a response to the inquiry on behalf of Heaps Decent, an arts organisation working in NSW.

Heaps Decent is an organisation registered with the ACNC providing opportunities for young people to engage in musical skills development and learning. Established in 2007, Heaps Decent is based in Sydney, and delivers a program in the Sydney metro area, plus regional and remote communities in NSW. We have worked extensively in the public school and independent school systems, specialising in work with at risk youth who have very interrupted histories of school engagement. We have worked consistently in special purpose school settings, ETUs and programs in youth justice among other environments. The opportunities for musical and creative learning for young people we encounter are highly variable and inequitable – the result of many barriers such as socio economic disadvantage, location, disengagement from learning and availability of resources.

Workshop facilitators in the Heaps Decent program are practicing artists – songwriters, musicians, producers – who have developed a unique set of skills to engage young people in skills development and self-expression through a shared love of music. During workshop sessions young participants work with artists at digital audio workstations and varied portable production set ups to create their own musical content. We utilise tech resources and innovation congruent with industry use and engage creatives who are navigating music industry careers. Students participate in a music experience and collaboration that is unique. This might be developed in a short series of sessions or over a longer period, with advanced and tailored skills development. The program is accessible to any young person, they don't require any prior musical learning. We strive to meet the interests and needs of individuals, to support their voices, stories and potential. Some are learning to play instruments, but most have never had the opportunity and have not considered music education or career pathways to be an option in their futures. The process of engagement in the program is often transformative and has enormous value for those who discover they can set their sights on a future in the creative industries. They begin to seek out other opportunities for musical learning and experience. All benefit from the many positive impacts for their development and well-being. Engagement has particularly strong outcomes in supporting mental health. The personal agency and confidence that emerges through program engagement is fundamental to this. There is a large body of research and evidence that demonstrates the significant value of musical and creative learning for all children and young people. Heaps Decent has delivered more than 3000 creative workshops with around 10,000 children and young people. We operate in a large cross sectoral network and have completed many projects and collaborations. We have a deep understanding of the value of arts and music education, and the significance of access for young people who experience several barriers to participation.

Our experience working with the Department of Education has not been straightforward and is dependent on establishing a relationship with teachers who are passionate about creative learning and push for more student opportunities. At times we can't make a connection with schools despite efforts – even when workshops have been offered at no cost because we know there is a lack of creative resources available to students. Whether it is an additional burden to manage visits within staff workloads or creative engagement is not a priority is hard to determine. Long term partnerships have been derailed when proactive teachers move on from schools. We do however have enduring

and excellent partnerships with schools that value enriched creative learning opportunities and networks with creative industry.

As an arts organisation with a mission to support equitable creative learning for young people we believe there is tremendous opportunity in increased, formalised and supported relationships between creative industry organisations, artists and schools. Partnerships should consider the wealth of skills and opportunity outside major cultural institutions and flagship arts companies when seeking to enrich learning and introduce viable pathways into creative careers. Arrangements could consider:

Dedicated Creative Learning Coordination

- Dedicated coordinators within schools or school regions (not further loads allocated to teachers) to facilitate programs between the school and an identified network of creative organisations / artists. Coordinated arrangements to co-develop plans, address gaps in resourcing, learning and student needs, and oversee the implementation of external creative programs to sit within the creative learning curriculum and align with educational standards. Coordination of further evaluation and impact studies could also sit here.

Professional Development for Educators:

- Training programs and professional development sessions for teachers, facilitated by artists and practitioners from creative organisations. This could support skills gaps, particularly in schools without dedicated arts and music teachers.

Grant and Funding Programs:

- Funding commitments specific to supporting the collaboration between schools and creative organisations and artists, and the implementation of tailored programs. A non-competitive program that identifies skilled artists and organisations working within NSW suitable for such collaborations.

Regional Delivery Allocations:

- Specific creative organisations and artists matched with designated areas, ensuring a consistent presence and tailored programs addressing the unique needs of students, schools and regions. This would support long-term relationships between organisations, artist practitioners and local schools, facilitating deeper community engagement and sustained learning impact.

Resource Sharing and Facility Use:

- Access for creative organisations and artists to use school facilities for workshops and programs outside school hours, and in school holiday periods. This would support a collaborative environment, provide more opportunities for creative engagement and make better use of available resources.

Student Mentorship Programs and pathways:

- Further opportunities for students to learn alongside creative practitioners and organisations, and gain industry experience outside the classroom. Apprenticeship schemes and incentives for school leavers tailored to creative industry occupations.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours Sincerely,

Nerida Woods (CEO)

Heaps Decent