

Submission
No 98

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

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Submitting as: K-12 Music Coordinator

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Teacher Background:

I completed the Special Music Education Course jointly conducted over four years by the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and Alexander Mackie Teachers College between the years 1966 and 1969. I turned down a Commonwealth Scholarship towards gaining a B. Mus at Sydney University. Music was my passion and secondary teaching was my goal. I felt the less prestigious choice would be more suited to preparing me for teaching while developing my skills as a musician. I received a Teachers College Scholarship and was bonded to the NSW Department of Education for five years with the expectation of completing two years of country service. I was assured of a job. Subsequently, I enjoyed teaching music in State High Schools for 14 years and I have served in my present position for the last 40 years. My first appointment was at a fairly new school in a housing commission area in Western Sydney and it was considered to be my country service. I was a replacement for a skilled music teacher who was moving on to the Conservatorium High School. These were big shoes to fill for a first-year-out teacher. But I was trained. My superior (Special Master) was an Industrial Arts teacher. Since Music was something that few professed to comprehend, I was left to my own devices for the most part. I've more than survived. Though the work has its difficulties, 55 years later, I'm still loving it. I trust this information will be seen as relevant to the views expressed in the body of this submission.

This submission seeks to address some of the matters detailed in section 1(b) and (c) of the Terms of Reference.

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

All students should have access to quality music education in the same way as they deserve quality teaching in other subjects including English and Maths and they need to be exposed to this from the earliest years. But there are obvious barriers. Despite much evidence and advocacy in terms of the benefits of music education for all, why are there still barriers to its delivery? For music education advocates, this has already been a long-term goal. How much longer is it to be long-term?

- There is a teacher shortage in general at the present time. Many teachers confess to feeling undervalued, over-worked and under-supported. **The respect for the profession has declined.** Add this to the old saying that “those who can do, and those who can’t teach” and we realise that there still is much work to be done in terms of elevating public perception of

teaching in general and music teaching in particular. How do we engage and retain skilled teachers to deliver quality music education in this climate? Suggestions have been made by other individuals and agencies in terms of offering incentives such as promotion, awards and other forms of recognition to music teachers to raise their public profile.

- There is still much room for advocacy. As the education ambassador for Sydney University, Eddy Woo is currently addressing the shortage of Maths teachers in promotional videos on the ABC. Music teaching can be addressed in similar ways. We saw some of this, for example, in the programs with Guy Sebastien on *Don't Stop the Music*. Music teachers themselves can play a major role in advocacy in their own school communities, particularly if they have the support of school leaders.
- The benefits of learning Music are well-known in terms of brain function and connection to other spheres of learning. I believe more needs to be made of its effect on physical, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being. The physical act of singing has health benefits. Singing or playing together can create a sense of belonging, of welcome, or social enjoyment. It can bring a class (or school) together, and finish or start the day or week on a positive note. Music does this as no other subject can. There are almost 50 nationalities in the school in which I teach, and I am a constant witness to the cohesion and sense of community that sharing music from different cultures brings. Witness the effect that singing in a choir has on older people or others with dementia. Witness how important music became during the pandemic. People took up learning instruments (in isolation). They performed and composed music to entertain and encourage others. They played and sang together online to connect through music. Now post-pandemic, and in a fractured society, we are dealing with the effects of student isolation, the increase of mental health issues and general anxiety especially amongst children and adolescents. Music has never been more important in the school curriculum.
- We have a crowded curriculum. If we can't seem to fit everything in, what can we afford to have less of? We acknowledge the value of play-based learning, but do we have time to play?
- Is our emphasis on literacy, numeracy and STEM in danger of crowding out the Arts, particularly Music, if its discreet educational value gets swallowed up in a general mixture of Arts.

(ii) The present level and status of formal music education across all levels, including primary, secondary and tertiary education

- Most concerning is the large number of primary schools in NSW where classroom music education is still not delivered despite being mandated in the curriculum. Early introduction to music education is so essential in terms of many aspects of a child's growth and development-physical, social, cognitive and emotional. The benefits are proven to carry over into other learning areas. Would that, as in Queensland, NSW primary school music education was undertaken chiefly by music specialists. If something is mandatory, non-compliance generally has serious consequences. Schools have faced threats of deregistration for far less. It is time that secure positions were created in primary schools for specialisation in Music. At present, undergraduate training in teaching primary music undertaken by pre-

service generalist teachers counts as next to nothing. There is also a need for more pathways to be created to allow generalist teachers to do specialised training in Music. I would like to add here that I have seen some suggestions for structuring KLAs across the week where Creative Arts has a weekly block assigned to it. There are also some sections of the day given to play. The standard way of beginning a primary school day many years ago was with singing and perhaps a singing game or finger play. Music needs to be experienced almost every day for reasons which I have already stated from the outset of this submission.

- Secondary education has seen a welcome increase in the number of students electing to study Music. The Music 1 Course in Stage 6 has been valued as an opportunity for latecomers to music study and those with little previous opportunity to pursue new and developing interest in the subject. The present NSW Syllabus for Stage 6 Music 2 and Music Extension has been of a standard which has allowed music students to graduate with excellence in this field. Of some concern is that the number of music students taking these higher levels is small. It would be hoped that the best of these students would be attracted to music teaching degrees at a tertiary level keeping the standard of entry high.
- The Music 1 Course was not initially designed for those who were pursuing tertiary level music studies although it should not preclude this from happening. The concern is that we need a good number of music graduates to be capable of teaching Music 2 and Music Extension. If this declines, it is likely that entry requirements will lower in order to produce teachers who may not then be capable in terms of teaching the higher skilled courses. I note that for entry to Sydney University, an ATAR of 85 is required for a Bachelor of Education (Primary), 80 for Bachelor of Education (Secondary) and 70 for Bachelor of Music and all other Music Education degrees. A student can be admitted to a Bachelor of Music course at Western Sydney University without an audition if a Band 4 is achieved in HSC Music.

(iii) Robust and evidence-based music education in initial teacher education courses in the tertiary sector.

This implies that a student graduating as a qualified music teacher should possess most if not all the skills required to teach every aspect of the primary/secondary music syllabus in the classroom context. Collaborative teaching can draw on team strengths but developing individual strengths in all areas should be the aim. Tertiary courses which qualify students to teach music in primary/secondary schools are many and various and I believe there is not equality of outcome here. Some early career teachers are graduating with little or no understanding or experience of major pedagogical methods of developmental musical training as a basis for the construction of a sequential programme of instruction e.g. Kodaly, Orff. Many lack the basic performance skills which enable them to coach advanced performers in the Music Extension Course or at least to competently accompany student performances.

(iv)-(viii) I will comment on the remainder of the terms of reference in a general way.

There are many excellent organisations providing support in terms of professional development for teachers in music and music education for school students. Musica Viva introduces students to a variety of concerts, and they provide excellent resources purposefully connected to curriculum outcomes. The Sydney Symphony Orchestra provides regular professional development opportunities for upskilling generalist teachers. Music in

Me (The National Music Teacher Mentoring Program) set up by Richard Gill OA has also been very successful in providing confidence and skill to classroom teachers engaged in music training right across Australia. Regional conservatoriums and creative professionals definitely have a place in adding to children's musical education and experience but all of the above should be delightful adjuncts to a school music program which is the only way to expose all children to quality music education as a foundation for life.

- It is undeniable that resources are required to support the delivery of quality music education. However, the most important of all resources is a well-trained teacher. Teachers of the Creative Arts are by nature creative themselves and while they may lack some physical resources in their school, they will find ways to deliver quality education with whatever they have. Rhythms can be performed as well on a bucket with two pieces of dowel as on an expensive drumkit.
- Not all administrative work is unnecessary, but creativity and teacher satisfaction flourish when programming and assessment are simplified by eliminating the number of dot points to be covered and boxes to be ticked.

Other Considerations

- A **Primary trained music teacher** should be capable of teaching all that the music syllabus requires. If there is more than one trained teacher at the school, teaching responsibilities could be shared across the stages drawing on relative strengths.
- A **Secondary School** needs to be equipped with a highly trained staff who can cover a wide range of skills. This includes instruction/guidance in Performance up to HSC Extension level, instruction in Composition to a high level, Musicianship and Aural Training, developing a student's understanding of music elements, the history of music, and music analysis. Let's not forget instruction in using music software and other electronic equipment for recording etc. In addition to this, teachers are expected to be able to run ensembles. I remember in the 70's that to deal with teacher shortage, the Department of Education imported American teachers. I worked with one or two and remember them being astounded by what we as Australian music teachers were expected to teach. They were used to teaching in a specialised area. There was a choir teacher, a band teacher, maybe three for different ensembles and a classroom teacher or two or three or six. It follows that if we have insufficient music specialists delivering quality education in NSW, the most economical way to do so is to ensure excellent training for every pre-service teacher.

My own training as a Secondary Music Teacher was taken between 1966 and 1969 when I completed a Specialist Music Course, taken jointly between the Sydney Conservatorium and Alexander Mackie Teachers' College (previously completed by many well-known music teachers, including the great music educator and advocate, Richard Gill). We did have to choose a second teaching subject, but few of us were ever called to use this as trained music teachers were much in demand. Our Leaving Certificate results were considered, and a performance audition was required at the outset. All of us were expected to take piano lessons for the four years even if our primary instrument was not piano and we had to sit rigorous examinations in this every year. We were also trained and assessed in accompaniment which means that, for the most part, we were capable of providing accompaniment for our own

students, saving them the expense of hiring accompanists for every performance. We were required to take a second practical study, which for many of us was singing. Great preparation for classroom and choral work! In addition to this, we were required to take 2 years of study on a string instrument, and one each on a brass and a woodwind instrument. With the addition of orchestration as a further study, we were prepared for leading school ensembles. I should not forget learning the recorder. Pedagogy was studied throughout the four years. We attended demonstration lessons. We began with Kindergarten which led to our first practicum. We worked up the stages to Senior Secondary over the four years. We thought some of this irrelevant at the time, but it proved to be invaluable in terms of introducing us to the philosophy and practice of important music education approaches – Kodaly, Orff, Suzuki, Dalcroize. Apart from its usefulness in understanding the pedagogical progression of successful music education practices, it became totally relevant with the growth of K-12 schools, where, like myself, a number of secondary music teachers became coordinators across the school.

- All the Music teachers I know, above all else are passionate about their subject and are dedicated to educating children and young people in the art and joy of Music. This enables them to push through many difficulties in the practice of teaching and they are set to endure, especially if support comes their way.

CONCLUSION

- Music education is essential for all school students in NSW.
- Quality music education needs to be delivered at every level by teachers properly trained to do so.
- When I first set out as a trainee teacher, scholarships and placements were available and we tended to concentrate most of our effort on one chosen subject. A second subject was there but few expected to teach it. Today, study choices are made with more flexibility in mind because of the likelihood of career change necessitated by the economy and the job market. However, I am still in favour of seeing Specialised Music Education Institutions and courses set up which are guaranteed to produce highly skilled prospective music educators. Secure job placements are required to bring this to reality.