

**Supplementary  
Submission  
No 100a**

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

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Dear Joint Select Committee on Arts and Music Education and Training in New South Wales,

Thank you for the invitation to complete an additional response to the parliamentary inquiry. As you are aware from my earlier submission and appearance at the committee, in addition to my roles at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, I am presently ASME NSW Chapter Vice Chair. In addition to this letter I have linked copies of the following ASME NSW documents (and documents we will refer to in our hearing) that are critical in relation to capturing a community response to the release of the draft curriculum:

1. [ASME NSW Report on the Status of NSW Music Curriculum, 2020](#)
2. [Letter template for ASME NSW Members to send to local MPs](#)
3. [ASME NSW Petition to the Legislative Assembly](#)
4. [Report on ASME Feedback Regarding the Proposed Stage 6 Music Syllabuses](#) featuring data collected at the Have Your Say Meeting at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music (17/11/24)
5. Results from Surveys of ASME NSW Members on the Draft Syllabuses:
  - a. [Music 1 and Music Life Skills](#) n=75
  - b. [Music 2](#) n=22
  - c. [Music Extension](#) n=24
6. [NSW Board of Studies Syllabus Development Process, 2014](#)

It is important that I reiterate the strong collective position ASME NSW and Drama NSW have outlined in the current petition to the Legislative Assembly and Government. As of Thursday November 21, the petition has over 4,000 signatures and is steadily growing in support. We collectively view the release of the 11-12 Music and Drama syllabuses as a significant backward step and not representing the values of our members. If not addressed with additional policy safeguards, we forecast a significant decrease in enrolments for Music and Drama courses, leading to ongoing implications for our state's artistic voice and the arts economy.

We therefore request that the Legislative Assembly call on the Government:

1. For an immediate suspension and removal of the draft Music and Drama 11-12 Syllabuses from circulation.
2. Advocate for a new review process to commence following the release of the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry Report on Arts and Music Education and Training.
3. Ensure the new review process is:

- a) Transparent
- b) Genuinely consultative with Music and Drama educators and stakeholders
- c) In alignment with leading and international Music and Drama curricula and research

The following viewpoints are my own, and not the views of ASME NSW, nor my employer. I would like to begin my personal submission by referencing the [open letter to the Hon Prue Car](#) that I helped develop and have co signed with 30 fellow music education academics condemning the draft syllabuses.

In my original submission to the inquiry, alongside evidence I presented during an inquiry hearing with my colleague Dr James Humberstone, I expressed significant concerns about the Syllabus development process. While not holding an official position at NESAs, I emailed extensive advice and feedback to improve the Music 7-10 syllabus. While there were improvements following the initial draft, the final version was at best a compromise, with some positives including, teachers gaining more autonomy in topic choice, explicit reference to inclusion of culturally-diverse musics, relevant embedding of music technology and culturally congruent content points to support the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music. A significant step backwards observed in our analysis, was the shift away from *integrated* learning experiences to long lists of content to be taught, primarily centring around verbal knowledge *about* music rather than active music learning.

Following its release and the end of non-disclosure agreement periods, I had several conversations with syllabus writers and Technical Advisory Group (TAG) members about the syllabus development processes TAG members commented on the inadequate number of subject experts in the room (and noticeably who was missing), while syllabus writers discussed drafts being released into the public in radically different formats from what they had collectively written. It is clear that consultation was inadequate and there was a need for a larger TAG group and more regular, open and transparent meetings with sectors, professional associations and leading music education academics. As part of ASME NSW's submission above, I have linked the previous syllabus development process that was far more consultative and open than the post Masters review version.

It is with great sadness that the release of retrograde Music 11-12 syllabuses does not come as a surprise. Despite providing extensive external support, and being nominated by ASME NSW to be on the TAG, I was not given the opportunity to be involved. I would like to again offer my support to NESAs to participate in a revised process and underscore our collective desire for a world-leading music curriculum. I strongly believe this inquiry will lead to real change impacting future generations of musicians.

While not employed by NESAs, information of the attack on Australia's most successful senior curriculum (calculated by enrolments and percentage of candidature) had been progressively leaked with music educators involved in the process feeling sidelined, not valued, and ultimately ignored. I compel the parliamentary inquiry to obtain recommendations and minutes from TAG meetings through FOI requests, to determine the extent to which these experts were ignored. I feel this would help music educators understand why our curriculum has been sent back to the 1960s. The music education community is often fractured with multiple professional associations and significantly

different learning contexts leading to distinctly different modes of music education. Through the release of these documents, NESAs has managed to unite everyone across sectors and associations to stand together in defence of our four 11-12 courses.

Upon reading the draft Music 1 syllabus, my first thought was to annotate the document to assist the syllabus writers in making changes. However, this task was completely impossible as the structure was completely inadequate and incredibly disconnected with the recently released 7-10 syllabus. Mirroring the first 7-10 draft, the evidence base was outdated with key voices missing, and in most cases, cited incorrectly throughout the document. It is likely that NESAs will offer a second "Have Your Say" period in response to this criticism. This is not in any way adequate and presents a huge risk with the current structure the syllabus is presented in. Therefore it is of utmost importance that we start again, with greater transparency, with real ongoing consultation and an expanded TAG and syllabus writing team (which I would happily join).

I encourage the inquiry to read the testimonies of teachers on the ground through the linked ASME reports, and from those invited to make individual submissions, such as Luke Chapman and Caitlin Sandiford. These emerging leaders in education provide a direct line to who these changes impact most. They know their students are incredibly concerned that the curriculum has taken away both teacher and student autonomy. To finish I will outline the most concerning aspects and impact of the changes in the Music 1 course - the course completed by the overwhelming majority of students in the state; the course with the largest enrolments in the country, the music course for everyone with no genre/style restrictions, the course I taught for 13 years; the only course available to the students in the low SES public schools I worked in; the course that helped keep many of my students in school; the course that helped many of my students transition into the music industry. Mandating topics limits teachers' ability to design culturally responsive learning experiences for students. This is an attack on inclusivity and will impact culturally diverse communities the most.

- Removal of electives attacks student autonomy, choice and the ability to extend themselves in areas of strength.
- Removal of composition from external assessment is unacceptable. This curriculum update was an opportunity to expand composition through the addition of audio-recorded/DAW submission. We had the opportunity to lead the sector by mandating this for all students to become creators. This removal devalues students as replicators-only rather than creators of new music. Our future artistic voice is at stake.
- Removal of musicology all together is equally unacceptable. Students need to have the ability to learn more about the music they are interested in and have achieved great success through this option. It cannot be shifted into an examination and students must be given the opportunity to complete deep, rigorous personal investigations (through essays and viva voces).
- The two hour, 50% exam focused on *music language* is unacceptable and does not represent best practice in research. This does not lead to a more *rigorous* mode of assessment and devalues music as a cultural practice and action. This will be acutely impact culturally diverse communities and EAL/D students.

I look forward to discussing this further in the hearing on Monday. Thank you for your support of music education.

Kind Regards,

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**Report submitted to ASME  
NSW, including  
recommendations for the  
inquiry**

Dr Thomas Fienberg  
24 July, 2024

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## Summary of Recommendations

**Recommendation:** Complete further research and documentation of best-practice case studies of “quality” music education, connecting curricular music with the interests, needs and strengths of diverse local communities.

**Recommendation:** Create NESA accredited roles for Primary music specialists and pathways for permanent employment in NSW Department of Education schools through a new subject/teaching area code: “Creative Arts - Music”

**Recommendation:** Increase hours for music (and arts education) in ITE Primary Education degrees.

**Recommendation:** Mandate a number of hours for music in each stage of learning.

**Recommendation:** Promote postgraduate courses in primary music education to enable generalist teachers to gain additional accreditation as primary music specialists.

**Recommendation:** Fund communities of practice between high school music teachers, generalist primary teachers and community stakeholders.

**Recommendation:** Complete regular updating of music curricula, as per best practice in other states, to respond to international developments and increasingly diverse tertiary and industry pathways.

**Recommendation:** Classify music as a “practical” course to support student engagement, a safer and more inclusive learning environment, and more equitable resource access for authentic music making experiences.

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

**Recommendation:** Increase 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.

**Recommendation:** Increase scholarships for pre-service music teachers from low SES settings and under-represented communities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

**Recommendation:** Increase funding for regional conservatoriums and consider re-branding them as “music-hubs” to encourage more diverse programs and access.

**Recommendation:** All music 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:** Reduce “content to be taught” in the 7-10 syllabus and a greater emphasis on active music learning.

**Recommendation:** Retain reference to “integrating learning experiences, rather than “inter-related focus areas”.



**Recommendation:** Integrate “music in practice” with “music in context”.

**Recommendation:** Include assessment of audio-only composition for the Music 1, Music 2 and Extension syllabi.

**Recommendation:** Guarantee professional associations will remain as NESAs Authorised Providers to lead independent and rigorous professional learning.

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

**Recommendation:** Provide additional government funding and incentives to connect First Nations creative artists and local knowledge holders with music education in schools.

**Recommendation:** Create and meet 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:** Create KPIs for the employment of qualified music teachers in schools with low ICSEA values and in regional, rural and remote communities.

**Recommendation:** Create and meet targets for increasing participation in Stage 5 and 6 music across all sectors.

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

**Recommendation:** Set KPIs for universities to match and exceed population parity for diverse and underrepresented communities (prioritising Aboriginal and Torres Islander Peoples).

**Recommendation:** Fund a literature review to investigate and evaluate notable approaches to music education in other states and OECD countries.

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

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 sole professional association that represents practitioners across all of these domains.

The group *Alberts: Music Education Right From the Start* [hereafter Alberts], has provided much needed public advocacy on the need for “quality ongoing sequential” music learning in curricular music. I agree on the need to focus on supporting the delivery of curricular music. Strong curricular music enables equitable access to music education for all young people in NSW. While highly beneficial, extra curricular music activities generally come with additional costs for parents, carers and schools and are no substitute for classroom music programs.

Defining “quality” music education is heavily debated within the music education community. Alberts position on “quality” is pedagogically skewed towards sustaining of Western instrumental traditions, with a bias towards mastery in Western music notation and the learning of “complex” musical instruments. This position does not align with contemporary international research in music education and ignores the different functions music has in culturally diverse contexts, including within First Nations communities (Fienberg, 2023a; 2023b; Lind & McKoy, 2016). A broader, more inclusive understanding of quality music education in line with rhetoric within the recently revised 7-10 Music Syllabus is encouraged.

*“Quality” music education in NSW should be ongoing and culturally relevant to local contexts prioritising students’ interests, needs and strengths.*

As will be discussed further in this submission, a key barrier to ensuring access to this broadened understanding of quality music education is inequitable implementation of curricular music within primary schools. Presently, the delivery of classroom music is variable and largely dependent on the interests of school principals (Hocking, 2023; Rogerson, 2021). There is a significant discrepancy between how music is delivered from school to school. There is a need for simultaneous support for classroom music specialists and classroom teachers.

To support the sustainability of classroom music specialists in primary schools, there is a need for NESA accreditation and recognition of this role within ITE music education 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. 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 through the creation of a “Primary - Creative Arts (Music)” Subject teaching area code. This presently exists for STEM, Primary Languages and Community Languages (NSW Department of Education, 2024).

To support generalist teachers in the delivery of culturally relevant, ongoing music education, more time must be allocated to music (and broader arts education) in ITE degrees. Allocation support is also required to help develop communities of practice with music teachers in local secondary schools. This models best practice in many regions where high school music teachers are released to provide mentoring and professional learning for feeder primary schools. Such communities of practice should also include community stakeholders (i.e. regional conservatoriums, arts centres and not-for-profit organisations).

While there are strengths in secondary curricular music (in large part due to the mandatory Stage 4 course), 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 help deliver culturally responsive, student centred, and industry relevant learning experiences for their students.

**Recommendation:** Complete further research and documentation of best-practice case studies of “quality” music education, connecting curricular music with the interests, needs and strengths of diverse local communities.

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**Recommendation:** Include assessment of audio-only composition for the Music 1, Music 2 and Extension syllabi.

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

## Primary Education

As previously discussed, primary music differs significantly across sectors and within sectors. This discrepancy is further amplified in regional, rural and remote settings. Primary music education in NSW is delivered predominantly by generalist teachers in line with the Creative Arts K-6 Syllabus (1999). Despite being a mandated part of the curriculum, many generalists feel uncomfortable teaching music, which leads to avoiding the art-form altogether. This is caused primarily through a lack of training in ITE degrees, with many institutions offering between 4-8 hours in music pedagogy. Similarly, formal music education has historically been connected with performance mastery, leading to community misunderstanding of the inclusive aims, rationale and content of current music curricula.

Due to the increasingly crowded music curriculum, many schools choose to program music as an intensive, to spread study of the arts across the year. In some schools, music is only provided as an “opt-in” choice for students through ensemble initiatives such as choir, concert band and musical production. This undermines teachers’ ability to deliver ongoing and sequential music learning experiences and fails to comply with current curriculum requirements. Recognising the value of music in schools, the DoE’s Arts Unit provides opportunities to enrich primary music programs through involvement in music festivals and large ensembles.

Primary music specialists also deliver the K-6 Creative Arts Syllabus. Teachers acting in these roles have either completed secondary music education degrees (with varying levels of focus on primary music depending on ITE program), or are generalist teachers with an interest/expertise in music. There is currently no formal NESAC 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. Within K-12 Independent schools, high school music teachers regularly support the delivery of the K-6 Creative Arts syllabus in the primary years.

With generalist primary teachers lacking confidence in music education and barriers towards a sustainable career in primary music teaching, many schools rely upon external businesses to service music education. While they provide valuable support to the delivery of curriculum, there is a need for accreditation of these businesses and greater oversight of their teaching programs. Many principals see these companies as a quick fix to fulfil curriculum requirements, however, it is questionable as to how effective this model is in regard to “quality” music education.

## Secondary Education

Music is in a significantly healthier position in secondary schools, thanks largely to the Mandatory Stage 4 Music Course. For the majority of students in NSW, this is the sole opportunity to be taught by a music 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. Research shows that music teachers are particularly prone to burn-out due to the extra responsibilities and expectations placed on them by their schools. 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.

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 most schools. There are major differences between access to resources across and within sectors. This has widened gaps particularly between Independent and comprehensive high schools. 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 of these initiatives have larger 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 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.

One barrier to engaging delivery of classroom music is the subject 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.

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. A further 44% 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).

A little over 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 offered at the majority of NSW High Schools. The two courses also have the highest mean socio-economic status of students, underlying the inequity of access (Roberts et al., 2021). This underscores the financial costs of “formal” music learning

pathways, which are often heavily reliant on external music tuition. The senior curriculum is presently under review for the first time in 20 years. This presents an important opportunity to align the syllabus with developments in the music industry and a far more diverse tertiary landscape. Enabling the submission of audio-only, non scored, compositions would provide the most significant development across the courses.

**Recommendation:** Classify music as a “practical” course to support student engagement, a safer and more inclusive learning environment, and more equitable resource access for authentic music making experiences.

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

## Tertiary Education

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 to 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.

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. 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’s *My Sydney Scholars* program alongside greater opportunities to study music education in regional universities should further diversify the music teaching workforce. Across NSW universities, ITE degrees focus on secondary music. Apart from the relatively unique Bachelor of Music (Music Education) degree at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music which offers a primary music placement, this leaves teachers inadequately equipped for working in primary contexts.

## Robust and evidence-based music education in initial teacher education courses in the tertiary sector

Several institutions across the state offer music education ITE courses. The majority of these courses are at the level of a Masters 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 are able to 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 increased significantly. This would enable pre-service educators to access diverse pedagogical strategies to support music learners in various school contexts. 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.

**Recommendation:** Increase 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.

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

## The role of regional conservatoriums and creative professionals in music education

The regional conservatorium network is an incredibly important component of music education in NSW. Music education advocates in other states are envious of the infrastructure of these institutions. With additional funding and a broader focus, regional conservatoriums could provide an even more valuable resource for their communities. At the heart of regional conservatoriums is instrumental and vocal tuition which is historically connected with Western Art traditions. The very name “Conservatorium” weakens the network’s ability to support culturally diverse and popular music. Re-considering “conservatoriums” as “music hubs” could lead to broader participation and representation of diverse musical traditions. ASME NSW acknowledges that many conservatoriums already provide incredibly rich and diverse access to music, however this is not universal. Regional conservatoriums could also expand their role in providing professional learning for generalist teachers.

**Recommendation:** Increase funding for regional conservatoriums and consider re-branding them as “music-hubs” to encourage more diverse programs and access.



## 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 in various stages of renewal for the first time in two decades. The Creative Arts K-6 Syllabus has passed two stages of review, the 7-10 Music Syllabus will be introduced in 2026 and the senior syllabi currently in development. ASME NSW holds strong concerns about the Curriculum Review process, particularly the sequencing of syllabus renewal and a lack of clarity about the broader continuum of music learning from K-12. The process has also been rushed with short consultation periods held during inconvenient time periods for music teachers to contribute.

When the current K-6 (1999), 7-10 (2003) and Music 1 (1999), Music 2 and Extension (1999) syllabi were published, was at the very least “of its time”, and arguably quite progressive on the international stage. While music is a mandatory and important subject for all children in Australia of school age up to the age of 14, as previously discussed, it is generally understood that training to teach music for generalist primary school teachers is very poor (Hocking, 2023), and therefore schools who cannot afford a specialist music teacher sometimes struggle to teach the curriculum.

One can consider the existing syllabi *of its time* because it extended comprehensive music education by asking that the “learning experiences” (Performing, Composing [Organising Sound in K-6] and Listening [Aural and Musicology in Stage 6]) be learned in an *integrated* manner, and because it extended this practical, or perhaps *praxial* approach toward culturally inclusive music. It is worth remembering that this syllabus came hot on the heels of the deeply influential first edition of *Music Matters* (Elliott, 1995) in the US, and *Musicking* (Small, 1998) in the UK: two books that interrogated and criticised the aesthetic approach to music education (Reimer, 1970) through the authors’ philosophical lenses. As a result, teachers were given a lot of autonomy to choose their own contexts (in a culturally responsive way, if they were so inclined) and to teach music in a musical way.

While teachers are given full autonomy to choose contexts in the K-6 and Stage 4 Mandatory Course, the “current” syllabi feature more rigid requirements especially in the Stage 5 Elective Course and Music 2 syllabus. The syllabi privilege the study of Western Art Music above other musics, with the stated rationale to serve “as a pathway for further formal study in tertiary institutions” (NSW Board of Studies, 1999, p. 5). With the diversification of the tertiary music sector, there is no longer the need for students to be forced into a compulsory art music focus. Instead, a more diverse and responsive curriculum is required to support students to prepare for a number of entry points into the music industry.

A key strength of the “current” Stage 6 curriculum is the HSC Practical Examinations process. This sector leading exercise is coordinated by a team of outstanding, experienced educators and involves markers travelling from school to school to examine students in performance and musicology (Music 1). Similarly, the composition marking process is highly rigorous and the inclusion of a mandatory composition in the Music 2 course has had a

significant impact on strengthening the Australian art music industry. As previously discussed, the new curriculum presents an opportunity to provide a more equitable access point to composition through the addition of an audio-only composition elective. This would align with industry practice in a variety of musical contexts and tertiary environments.

Despite the strong philosophical and research underpinnings, as well as the encouragement that “in designing teaching programs, teachers should provide a program that balances work in each of the learning experiences. Learning in music occurs best when these experiences are integrated with each other.” (NSW Board of Studies, 2003, p.18), there are problems with the “current” curriculum. The chief of these is that many teachers misunderstand comprehensive musicianship’s *Elements* (called *Concepts of Music* in current NSW curriculum) as the *content to be taught* rather than, as intended, a nomenclature with which to organise broader understanding of music and ideas about music. As a result, some teachers directly teach the *concepts*, verbal knowledge about music, instead of teaching music itself. This contradiction is significantly amplified in Music 1, Music 2 and Extension, where the aural examination has led to a proliferation of textbooks teaching the concepts of music as content with minimal reference to repertoire/context.

With a significant gap in the modification of music curriculum, the Masters Curriculum Review presented NSW with the opportunity to develop an internationally renowned, sector leading K-12 continuum of music learning. ASME NSW believes that the curriculum development has been stifled by pressure from the NSW Government to focus on “content to be taught” rather than active praxial engagement through integrated learning experiences.

It is important to note that the release of the 7-10 Music syllabus (implementation in 2026) has led to some significant improvements. Instead of prioritising certain musical cultures over others, the 2026 syllabus provides five broad repertoire requirements to be covered: Music of Australia, including music of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, Art music, Jazz, Popular music, and “Global music culture”. The mandating and more consistent reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music throughout the syllabus responds to current research and is sector leading for its localised, consultative approach to implementation (Fienberg, 2023a; 2023b; Webb & Bracknell, 2021).

The 2026 syllabus’ published “Aim” sounds as praxial as the 2003 syllabus, mentioning ambitions for teaching and learning music such as “active engagement”, “enjoyment”, and to “develop a lifelong sense of wonder and curiosity about and engagement with music”. There has also been some work done to de-centre the score as (only) text, acknowledging the increased accessibility of Digital Audio Workstations in compositional settings.

While the focus on elements (formally known as concepts) remains, the new syllabus has been supplemented by a far stronger emphasis on context. This responds to research over the past twenty years that music is not a universal language and therefore must be studied through culturally relevant pedagogical approaches (Abril, 2013; Dunbar-Hall, 2000; Lind & McKoy, 2016). Unfortunately, the syllabus separates “music in context” with “music in practice,” risking the perpetuation of outdated division between practical and theoretical music education in NSW classrooms.

This leads to the primary weakness of the new syllabus and movement away from truly

praxial, integrated music learning. The new syllabus contains significantly more content on verbal knowledge *about* music, rather than embodied musical knowledge. This includes 56 Content points in Stage 4 and another 57 points in Stage 5. 19 of 22 content points under “Listening” are verbal knowledge. Further, changing the nomenclature from integrated *Learning Experiences* to *Focus Areas*: has the potential to further the dichotomisation of “prac and theory”, and weakens the encouragement to teachers to teach music musically. In addition to these major problems, the state government have failed to align the syllabus with the national Australian Curriculum, and while they claim in the promotional videos that it is evidence-based, there is very little research evidence in the field of music education that would suggest this is a great syllabus (Fuller, 2022).

While the final version of the K-6 Creative Arts syllabus is yet to be released, it too appears to be subtly moving away from the praxial nature of the “current” syllabus. The previous draft revealed significant issues as curriculum aligned the arts with contexts in other KLAs, undermining teachers’ ability to deliver quality music education that is culturally relevant to local contexts prioritising students’ interests, needs and strengths. Notwithstanding the K-6 syllabus does provide teachers with a sequential curriculum that is rigorous and if adequately resourced will provide NSW students with a strong grounding for further musical development in high school.

**Recommendation:** All music 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:** Reduce “content to be taught” in the 7-10 syllabus and a greater emphasis on active music learning.

**Recommendation:** Retain reference to “integrating learning experiences, rather than “inter-related focus areas”.

**Recommendation:** Integrate “music in practice” with “music in context”.

**Recommendation:** Include assessment of audio-only composition for the Music 1, Music 2 and Extension syllabi.

## 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 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 NESAs 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.

**Recommendation:** Guarantee professional associations will remain as NESAs Authorised Providers to lead independent and rigorous professional learning.

## The most effective approach for the music and the creative industries to coordinate 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 in NSW. 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, 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:** Embed 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, such as 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 stronger relationships over time 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:** Provide additional government funding and incentives to connect First Nations creative artists and local knowledge holders with music education in schools.

## Measures of success in music education

This report has outlined numerous measures of success in music education. Fundamentally, 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)

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:** Create and meet 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:** Create KPIs for the employment of qualified music teachers in schools with low ICSEA values and in regional, rural and remote communities.

**Recommendation:** Create and meet targets for increasing participation in Stage 5 and 6 music across all sectors.

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

**Recommendation:** Set KPIs for universities to match and exceed population parity for diverse and underrepresented communities (prioritising Aboriginal and Torres Islander Peoples).

## 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 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 to 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.

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



## 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:** Fund a literature review to investigate and evaluate notable approaches to music education in other states and OECD countries.

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