EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the extent, benefits and potential of music education in Victorian schools

Mildura — 1 May 2013

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Mr R. Williams, Music Coordinator, Mildura Senior College;
Mr L. Penna, Music Coordinator, Irymple Secondary College; and
Mr L. Peak, Music and Year 8 Coordinator, Chaffey Secondary College.
The CHAIR — Thank you very much for appearing before us this afternoon and for having us in Mildura. What we are going to do today is we have a series of questions for you. We will give you an opportunity to answer those questions and tell us a little bit about what is currently happening in your schools. We are recording the evidence today through Hansard. You will have the opportunity to view that evidence and make any changes that need to be made.

I also need to point out that the evidence you give today is covered by parliamentary privilege, which is the same privilege afforded to members of Parliament. That is for the hearing proper and not for anything that is said outside of this room. Having said all of that — it sounds very formal — but this is a chat; it is a conversation. We want to know what is happening in your schools in terms of music and what we can do to improve music in schools throughout Victoria.

I might kick it off with the first lot of questions. Could you provide an overview of how music is delivered as part of the curriculum in your school? Are instrumental music lessons offered at your school, and if so, how much is the parent contribution towards these lessons? What other types of extracurricular music activities does your school offer?

Mr WILLIAMS — At our school, Mildura Senior College, we cater just for years 11 and 12. At year 11 level we have VCE units 1 and 2 music. We offer solo performance and nowadays, with the new study design, you can do that as a soloist or in a group, so those two things are together. We also offer VET music — a certificate II in music at year 11 level. That is done through COSAMP.

At year 12 level we offer VCE units 3 and 4 music, solo performance again, and VET certificate III in music, and we can use units of competency done in year 11 certificate II to help with the certificate III. Also at year 12 level there is an opportunity for students to branch off into audio engineering. Because the two courses are very similar at year 11 level, everyone does the same, but when you get to year 12 there is an opportunity, if you do not want to perform as a musician, for you to go off and do audio engineering and pick up other units of competency. In terms of subjects, that is what we offer at the Mildura Senior College.

We have instrumental specialists who come in. We have guitar, brass and woodwind, percussion and drums; have I forgotten any? That would go with woodwind, so flute as well. We have those teachers coming in, usually one day a week, and at our school we have half a day on Wednesday that is available for those teachers to teach students on a rotating timetable, usually on Wednesday. They come in once a week for lessons.

The only contribution I believe is the general one that all students pay for the subject, in terms of there being no actual fee for the music lessons per se by the instrumental teachers; as far as I know that is the case, but I would have to check that. What were the other aspects of the question?

The CHAIR — About other extracurricular activities.

Mr WILLIAMS — Performance-wise we are always on the lookout for things happening in the community. We often get emails like ‘There is this awards night; have you got someone to play?’, or special functions, education department retirees where they want some musicians there and usually we get a call to put some musicians into that.

We have a big concert that goes on each year called The Beat, which is when all the primary schools and high schools in the area get together. We get together in a venue like the arts centre and for two days it is music from five-year-olds right up to the Year 12s performing a variety of different music, dance and drama items, so that is the big one.

Just at our school we have what is called a performing arts showcase, which again, we might go to the arts centre if it is available, or Mercy Theatre up here. That is a showcase of Year 12 work from the performing arts — so it is drama, music and dance, and there will be an item for each. It is a great evening. Parents come in and are fully supportive of that.

In relation to other in-house concerts we do with the VET course, I can get the Year 11s in certificate II in music putting on their own concert and doing every aspect of that from promoting it to designing the tickets, designing the brochures, promotional posters, marketing, and rehearsing the acts. Those who are interested in audio engineering get to set up the PA systems and the lighting, and, of course, I oversee all that. The students are mainly hands-on with that, so it is an experience for them. We usually only get to do one of those a year, late in term 3, but I hope to do more than that in the future because the kids really love it. They really enjoy that part of the curriculum, especially performance time. After a performance they are all so glad that they did it, all beaming, and their self-esteem goes right up. They are on fire to do some more and ask, ‘When can we do this again? Next weekend?’ It is that sort of thing.
Mr PEAK — I am Luke Peak, the Year 8 Coordinator and Music Coordinator for Years 7 to 10 at Chaffey Secondary College. Year 7 music is compulsory for all students for a term. Basically it is a taster, it is an introduction to performing music and how to play an instrument, such as keyboards and percussion, and basically to get a sense of where students are at as they come through from the various feeder primary schools. Some programs are better than others at the primary schools, so students are at different levels. I am just trying to get an idea of where the students are at in Year 7. We do have a lot of students who take music outside of school, in terms of instrumental lessons, and so it is a good opportunity for me to identify those students and then promote my program at Year 7.

For Year 8s, 9s and 10s it is elective. We have a unique curriculum at Chaffey called Chaffey modular learning, so we do not actually have Year 8 music, Year 9 music and Year 10 music. What we offer is modules. This term, for example, I am offering intro rock band, experience music performance, film music and a production band, so students are able to choose those subjects based on their interests and ability. Intro rock band, for example, will have a selection of Year 8, 9 and 10 students depending on where they are at musically. Experience music performance is the same. So we are not segregating the students by Year levels; it is based on where they are at musically.

We have a lot of ensembles that are operating this year. We have the percussion ensemble, guitar ensemble, the stage band, and we have a production as well that we are putting on at the end of this term. That is really busy at the moment in the whole arts department. We are rehearsing four or five times a week. What we are actually able to do is put rehearsals within the timetable. So rather than have rehearsals after school and during lunchtime, we have actually created a production ensemble subject that the students who have pre-enrolled into it can pick, and that allows them to perform and rehearse with the production during school hours, which we found very beneficial.

In terms of instrumental music, students can choose at the start of the year from guitar, bass, voice, drums, percussion, brass and woodwind. It is $20 for students for the whole year if they want to do vocal, guitar and bass. It is $70 if they want to learn drums and percussion, to cover the costs of the upkeep of the instruments. If they are doing brass and woodwind and they want to hire an instrument from the school, it is $140.

The CHAIR — What is the uptake of that program?

Mr PEAK — Since I have been there it is gradually getting better and better. This year we have 65 students enrolled in instrumental music, which is a pretty good number.

Mr PENNA — I am Leigh Penna, music coordinator at Irymple Secondary College. It is a 7 to 10 school, similar to Chaffey. In Year 7 we offer music as part of the core subjects, so they do two sessions a week for six months or a semester. In that we just generally let them experience music the best they can, whether that is playing or just experiencing listening to music. We do a fair bit on technology, using computers and music. They enjoy that style of thing. It is quite instant, and they get success pretty quickly. In Year 8 through to Year 10 we offer it is an elective system — we have just changed this year — and they will elect to do it for six months. They cannot choose it for the full year, just for the six months. Year 8 is just a general stream again, and then when we get into Year 9 and Year 10 we can quite often filter them off into instrumental or just a general interest thing in music.

In terms of the extra stuff that we offer, we also have production and there are rock bands and other ensembles in amongst that and also choir. In terms of the instrumental program, similarly to the rest of the secondary schools in the district, we offer brass, woodwind, drums, guitar and vocals. We have a few students that are string, but unfortunately we do not cater for them in the school setting. They are actually coming from outside, so we allow them as best we can within the program, within the constraints of what we do.

In terms of funding, we charge a fee of $120 for any student who takes the instrumental lessons. That is regardless of the instrument. If they do the brass woodwind we then charge the hire fee for the instruments. That is a school-based decision based on stuff that is happening in the district and the way the funding works. Ever since we have introduced that our program has gone downhill; it is really starting to flatten out. The uptake is not there anymore and it is quite restrictive in the school.

The CHAIR — So the money has been the — —

Mr PENNA — I put the money down as one of the major issues. When the fee was quite low a few years ago we had an uptake of about 110, I suppose. Now we are down to 60 or 70, in that mark, over a period of three or so years since that has gone in.
The CHAIR — What was it and what is it now money-wise?

Mr PENNA — It is $120. It used to be $60 or something like that; and that is to cover offsets of deficits in the funding and the way it is done in the Sunraysia area.

Mr CRISP — I am looking for you to discuss the challenges faced by rural and regional schools. What are the difficulties and barriers that you face trying to deliver a music program and have you got any suggestions on how that could be improved?

Mr WILLIAMS — One of the main difficulties of course is being so far away from a lot of live concerts and things that are happening. We do get some really good concerts up here, but not as much as in Melbourne. That would be one of the main difficulties. We try and see as much as we can when they come up here though. With the Eisteddfod coming up there is a high-profile guitarist coming along to adjudicate who is offering master classes so we will take the opportunity to take part in those hopefully.

Mr CRISP — What does that cost?

Mr WILLIAMS — In relation to the master class, I would put in a submission for that as something that our music department would pay for. There probably would not be a charge to the kids for that. It would be during class time; that one would be a guest that I would bring in, I would think.

Some other difficulties would be of course at recital time. For Year 12 the department gets some assessors up here as often as they can, depending on numbers in the district, but invariably we have two or three different instruments where students have to go to Melbourne for the recital. They are usually done on a Sunday or a Saturday, so students have to fly or drive down on a Friday which is a bit of a difficulty for them. If they do not come from Melbourne, if they are from Adelaide or wherever, they do not have anywhere to stay relative-wise. That would be in my mind restrictive for some parents; knowing that to study music at a high level you may have to go to Melbourne and it might cost you $500 or $600 just for that recital. That is a major difficulty at the end of the year for me.

But, as I said, they send up, where they can, some assessors. They are usually guitarists, drummers and that sort of thing. They will integrate that with the VET assessments. If you have two or three rock bands then they might be able to send up a guitar assessor for the VCE as well. It depends on numbers and they work it out in Melbourne.

Mr ELASMAR — Is there an adequate number of specialist classroom music teachers and instrumental music teachers available in the Mildura region and are there any other issues schools face with respect to staffing the instrumental music program?

Mr PENNA — This is one of my areas that I should like to say a fair bit about. One of the restrictions we have in this area is that we do not get many applicants for the positions that come up for either the classroom or the instrumental, particularly instrumental, so often we are left in a predicament. If we have one applicant, do we fill that position with that person or do we go without anybody? Often, and I have been around this district for 14 or 15 years, on occasions we fill them just with a person rather than with a music teacher. So that can be restrictive and I think it is detrimental to the program at times that we make a choice based purely on getting someone in that job rather than the correct person in the position.

Classroom-wise, it is generally not a huge problem, so that similar thing does not happen. We have had some really effective classroom teachers across the district that I have seen over time, often beginner teachers, and they come in being really quite enthusiastic with that. Whether we hold them for a couple of years in the district remains to be seen. Occasionally they move back to the city because they are not getting what they need up here, and I think that is one of the hindrances in rural areas. I have previously taught in Horsham and it was a similar thing there. They move into the town for four or five years, find their feet, move back to the city and go back into what they are in music for as a musician. They miss that side of it, too. They cannot do that within the community and so they go back and take their skills back into the towns with them.

Ms MILLER — Are you happy with how the funding for the instrumental music program is currently allocated to schools, and are there any changes you would like to see made to the current model? That is open to the panel.

Mr PEAK — I am not aware of how much we receive or how much we are supposed to pay from the school; that is something our business manager and principal would be able to answer. But I know how much we charge our students and I
know that if we charged any more, we would not be able to maintain the numbers. I think we are running at a deficit; I am pretty sure. I am getting that sense, but they have not told me, and I have not asked because I do not really want to know.

**The CHAIR** — Do you know what the kids pay at the moment?

**Mr PEAK** — Yes, I know what the kids are paying.

**The CHAIR** — What are they paying?

**Mr PEAK** — They are paying $20 for the whole year.

**The CHAIR** — It is $20?

**Mr PEAK** — Yes, but they pay more for the hire instrument. That is really cost effective and they are getting a very good deal, but I am very reluctant to increase the price for that because that will have a negative impact on the program. But I know for a fact that we are pretty tight. I am not sure exactly about the figures.

**Mr PENNA** — In general, just from the information that I have had, each school up here has to foot out of its normal global budget about $8000 to $9000 per year to offset a deficit in the funding for the instrumental teachers. The pool of money that comes in is not big enough to supply what we really need and the demand in the program, so that is quite restrictive. That is why at my school the fees had to go up, because we had to find this extra money that was needed, that was paid into that pool, so we could actually have the number of teachers that we required. If that were not the case, we would be down a teacher more than likely.

I personally, and with the experiences that I have had in teaching, find the way the funding is done in this district quite inhibiting. Each school is allocated a number, and, say at our school we have got an allocation for a 1.1 instrumental teacher. Basically then you have no choice in how you would use that 1.1. In this case, in this region, it is distributed as a senior college and that is a way it is structured here in Sunraysia, and I cannot focus on a particular area of music that perhaps I would like my program to focus on. If I wanted to do a concert band part, I am just allocated to have that teacher one day on a particular day depending on the demand. So you cannot build your program according to your classroom teachers or your school’s focus. I am try to find the word for it, but you are hamstrung — —

**Mr WILLIAMS** — Your vision?

**Mr PENNA** — Yes. You cannot proceed with where you would like to see the program go. I have a background in brass bands. If I wanted to do that, I would not have that teacher there for that period of time. With a rock band it is the same sort of thing. You might have a brass specialist sitting there with no students while there is demand in the rock area, for example, in guitar, and you are only allocated that one day a week.

**The CHAIR** — Do you have any say in any of that? Do you come at the beginning of the year and work out what schools want to do what type of stuff and share those resources?

**Mr PENNA** — It is basically based on figures. It is not based on — —

**Mr WILLIAMS** — On student numbers.

**Mr PENNA** — Yes, student numbers

**Mr WILLIAMS** — Yes, on how many we have that are doing an instrument this year. If we have 50 guitarists district-wide, then they would allocate different times to wherever those students were on a needs basis.

**Mr PENNA** — But you do not get a say if you want to develop a specialist program, and if you want to do a jazz program or something like that, you are just allocated based purely on numbers. Recently I had an allocation taken off and distributed somewhere else because the teacher was down, and there were quite a few factors in what happened there. They have now been redistributed within the Sunraysia area. That is one that I think is one of the biggest restrictions in this community.

I worked down at Horsham as a classroom and instrumental teacher. I worked in both areas in the one school, and it was a very effective program at that stage because you were in the school all the time. At the moment the instrumental teachers come in on that particular day and go out and you do not see them for another week. In some cases — last year, for
example, with one of the teachers — for various different reasons it can be five weeks between one lesson and the next with her students. We lost them because they were not getting that continuity. That is one of the downfalls that I see in this area with the way the funding is done.

The CHAIR — What would you do to address that?

Mr PENNA — I have given that a fair bit of thought over the years and spoken to quite a few principals and different people about it. I would probably allocate it — I do not know how you would do it — on a needs basis. Give the equivalent money of the allocation of funding — let us say, in my case this year, 1.1 — to the school, and then leave the employing of those staff up to the school. That way you can employ whoever you would like. We could have that specialist jazz program by getting a jazz specialist in. They could also work in a classroom. At the moment there are two classroom teachers at our school and 1.1 instrumental. If the funding was coming into the school individually, you would now have three full-time teachers in there, and your program would be a lot stronger because there are three of you trying to work instead of in some cases when I have been there by myself trying to run the rock band. That just becomes tiring and you get burnt out fairly quickly, and there goes your enthusiasm for what you are doing.

The CHAIR — What do you both think of the proposed model that Leigh has suggested?

Mr WILLIAMS — It is a tricky one. There is a lot of good work that goes on with how it currently stands, but there is always room for improvement, but I am not sure how you would do that in regional areas such as this with the limited staff that we have. I do not have a lot to do with the actual funding or how all that works. I guess I am just thankful for what comes into the school to assist. As has already been mentioned, we do not have instrumental teachers for every instrument. With violin and piano, we do not have those two important instruments as instrumental teachers in the region employed by the government, so those kids have to go off and get private teachers elsewhere. I am not sure what the answers are. I do not really have anything to add to what Leigh said. It was quite comprehensive.

Mr PEAK — I think it would be good if music coordinators had more autonomy in how they can utilise the district instrumental teachers in their schools and have a bit more to do with the decision-making process about how these teachers are allocated and what the need is. They could sit down with us, and we could talk about the program that we want to drive and that we want to create in our schools, not one that is handed to us and we are forced to deal with. I think that would be a lot more effective because we all have different visions, different kids and strengths and abilities in different areas, be it different styles of music or a different focus. Some people want to have a performance focus; some people want to have a music technology focus. It could be jazz, it could be classical or it could be a rock band. Different schools have different ways of doing things, and I am not saying that instrumental teachers are not doing that, but I think it could be a lot better and our programs could be facilitated a lot more effectively if we had more of a push to create the sorts of programs we want with those instrumental teachers on board.

Mr WILLIAMS — I will add that for my school I think the role changes a bit at senior level in that we have it pretty mapped out as to what needs to be done. A high level of instrumental skill needs to be developed in the student, so there is not much room for any of the things that my colleagues are talking about, which are highly relevant in the younger years, but at senior level it is pretty mapped out as to what they need to do.

Mr PENNA — Also, in saying that it is mapped out, the strength of your program comes from the strength of our program.

Mr WILLIAMS — Correct.

Mr PENNA — If our program at a 7 to 10 school — and we are unique in this region; there are not many regions that have a 7–10 structure — is quite weak down at the bottom end, the programs at the top end will also effectively struggle for numbers. I know the VCE numbers — I am not sure what your numbers are, Rick — but looking at other districts, the VCE numbers in this area are quite low. That is not attributed to up the top; I think that is more what is happening at the bottom end of music education.

Mr CRISP — Rick, just to build on some of your earlier information about your VCE and VET music programs, can you tell me how many students are typically enrolled in this year and that at Mildura Senior College?

Mr WILLIAMS — Yes, usually for the VET course there are slightly more. You might get an enrolment of 20 to 25. The VCE course, being perceived as the more academic course and more focused just on instrumental, is anything from 18
to 23 — somewhere in there, if you took an average. But this year it is fairly low and other years it goes more than that. They would be the numbers.

Mr CRISP — You talked earlier about the courses that you offer in both VCE and VET. Are there difficulties in trying to deliver VCE and VET programs to that number of students? Can you detail some of the issues you are facing in delivering those programs?

Mr WILLIAMS — Other than the difficulties of remoteness and opportunities for seeing performances and things, I do not see any real difficulties. We do not have as many resources as other schools — like rooms to rehearse in and things like that — but I do not think we would be alone there. We make do with what we have.

Mr CRISP — If you were going to improve any part of that, what would you improve in the delivery of those two programs? What would you like to see improved in the delivery of those programs?

Mr WILLIAMS — Probably more places to practice and rehearse. More equipment would be nice. Nowadays you can get JamHub, which is where you can put a whole band into a box and they hear each other on headphones. So you could have four or five of those types of groups in one venue, all rehearsing away and not — at the moment I have to have one group down in another room, quietly rehearsing, whilst others are doing theory work or whatever, and then, ‘Okay, time to swap’, and you would swap over to another group. So it is a continual process of rotating in the one room. That is the way I work at the moment. Yes, I guess extra funding for resources — technology basically — would help out a lot.

Mr CRISP — Thanks, Rick.

The CHAIR — Looking at Indigenous programs or support for Indigenous students, can some of you talk us through what might be on offer there? Are some of those programs used to also support the teaching of culture to non-Indigenous kids as well when it comes to music?

Mr WILLIAMS — In my school I have never had any Indigenous instruments come in. It would be good to see that, but at this stage it has not happened. I am involved in the VCAL group as well and I have some Indigenous fellows in there who I know are into guitar playing and drumming informally. They really enjoy that, so as part of their VCAL course I would like to get them playing songs and things and rehearsing music to keep them engaged in the other aspects of that course. They are foundation-level students so their literacy and numeracy are fairly weak, but they love music and can participate in that. I guess not in the VCE programs or the VET programs — I have not really got a place for them at the moment, although I do have one young African lad and a young Tongan girl doing units of competency from certificate II. They will mainly achieve the performance side of things though. They do not read that well, so when it comes to studying occupational health and safety and other aspects of the course like that it is very difficult to get them to achieve those units of competence, at this stage anyway.

But they can certainly benefit from participating in music-making. It really lifts their spirits and keeps them engaged. It can then help you to do the other work that you need to do as part of VCAL courses. That is the main area where I can see there would be some fruit to get, if it was pursued in more detail. I have only just started that this year.

Mr PEAK — There are a lot of Koori kids at school who engage in music. I do not find that I need to differentiate the units that I am looking at with the students purely because they are Koori. Those students love music. They want to come in; they want to play the instruments. I suppose I focus on a much more practical approach. They like to learn music aurally; they like to listen to it and play by ear. So we focus on that a lot — they get out the instruments and figure out what is going on. I give them a set of notations. I might give students tablature, which are diagrams on how to play these instruments, which is a lot more visual. That is not just for Koori kids; a lot of my students are like that, but that approach resonates with those students. I find I have a lot more interest in my CMLs, so the modules I am offering, when it is practically based and they are in there on the instruments playing.

I did one particular unit last year, world music, and there was an Indigenous perspective in that, and the students really appreciated that. We talked about bands like Yothu Yindi and their importance and significance in rock culture in Australia. That was really effective and we took that somewhere, which was fantastic. But there are no actual programs tailored for those types of students.

The CHAIR — Leigh, do you want to add anything?
Mr PENNA — Not really, we are in a similar position. We do not have a tailored program for Indigenous students. We have a fairly low number of Indigenous students at our school so we tend to just put it as a general thing. Sometimes when quite specialised programs come in often as a classroom teacher I do not find out about them; they go somewhere else in the school. That is why I think that is just where it comes in. You find out at the last minute — I think there is one next week that I found out about today. Someone else has picked up on it within the school, not necessarily the music area. You actually lose out a little bit in just the way it has been divvied out or where the information comes to in the first place.

Mr CRISP — I would like to explore a little bit more about instrumental music teachers. I know, Leigh, you talked about having 1.1 and the difficulties of managing that, but also whether there are any other particular issues that schools have with the current model for employing instrumental music teachers?

Mr PEAK — I think the recruitment strategy could possibly be refined, but as Leigh said before, I think that is down to the amount of applicants who apply. I would like to know how some of these positions are advertised. If they want to attract specialist teachers from the cities — as I was attracted to the job here — I know for a fact there are a lot of highly qualified specialist graduates coming out of these universities who probably would not even know that there is a job up here because sometimes they are not advertised as well as they could be. I think the strategy that is put in place to recruit these teachers could be looked at. I am making assumptions here; I do not know exactly how it is done, but it needs to be reviewed in some capacity.

Mr PENNA — I have sat on interview panels for positions in this area and usually you are interviewing one or two people and that is all the applicants you had. At the end of the day you have to make a decision. ‘Okay, the students go without a teacher or with this teacher’ and you know full well that the teacher who is being employed is probably not suitable. But at the end of the day you have to put someone in there, and that comes down to decision making. It is quite interesting to be on those panels and making those decisions. It is restrictive — one applicant for a position, whereas that same position in the city — —

One of the music coordinators down in the southern metro area of Melbourne often tells me how many applicants they get for positions. For one position they might get 80 applicants, so the selection in the city area versus the rural is quite restrictive.

The CHAIR — Do you have any ideas that provide a solution to that?

Mr PENNA — I suppose one of the things in this area is the funding — I come back to the funding again. It comes in, so they look at the cheapest alternative or the best way to use that. At the moment in this area we have teachers who are not qualified in the teaching profession who are able to teach because they have their VET registration, which is another issue that they are going under at the moment. They are able to teach but not necessarily at the top of the pay scale. For example, I am currently a classroom teacher. If I went into an instrumental teacher’s role in the district, if the position came up, I would take a wad of funding off. Up the top of the pay scale at the moment I would get about $85 000, and the instrumental teachers — I do not know the full figure — might be paid $70 000. That has got to come out of the pool of money. The expertise is not there either. You do not attract the more experienced teacher. You are taking away from the rest of the program too.

Ms MILLER — What are the panel’s views on whether there is adequate access to professional learning opportunities in music for teachers in the Mildura region and ways to improve access?

Mr PEAK — I do not think there is adequate professional development for our specific learning area for music. I have had to go to Bendigo a couple of times, but I think technology is going to change things in the next couple of years.

Mr WILLIAMS — The broadband and the videoconferencing will alleviate a lot of that.

Mr PEAK — We do not have to physically be at a professional development venue; we can do it remotely. I think that is something that is going to change things hugely in coming years. We are isolated here. It is difficult and costly for us to go to PD sessions. There is accommodation and flights, and the school is put in a bit of a position to weigh up whether it is going to be worth it for us to go to this professional development session because it is going to cost hundreds of dollars for one day for one person. That is because we are up here.

Mr PENNA — We are also restricted because the PD is down there. People have come up to Mildura a couple of times to present the PD, and those sessions were well taken up because the costs were not there. We could get out of school for the day easily because it was only a matter of replacing you as a teacher. There was not the funding to go to Melbourne —
fly down or drive down — and that sort of thing. When they come up here the uptake of those programs is really high. I
have had a couple of discussions with some of the PD providers down there trying to get them up here. In this area we have
quite a few schools that will come in and do PD sessions, even down as far as Murrayville. They will come up to Mildura to
do these PD sessions. Then to go anywhere they have got to drive anywhere. We have had people from Swan Hill and
Robinvale and that sort of thing attend these sessions. They are quite good.

Mr PEAK — They do not happen very often. I have not been to one yet, and this is my third year. I have not once gone
since I have been here. They are few and far between.

Mr PENNA — If we go down there, it is a lot of money. It is more cost-effective to bring them up here. They will
deliver a better PD session all around.

Mr ELASMAR — You both mentioned technology, so what is your view on the opportunities technology offers to
enhance the delivery of music education in rural and regional areas?

Mr PEAK — The 21st century music classroom is a lot different to the music classroom of even 5 or 10 years ago. The
whole music industry has changed, and I think that the music education has to reflect that. It is changing rapidly. Music
notation software, composing music, using software, recording music and doing sound production is all very relevant to
young people when they engage with that stuff, and it is how the music industry works. The more that we offer, the more
engaged the students are. I know there are a few schools at the moment that are implementing some exciting new music
technology, and what I have heard has been very positive. I am about to pose a few changes to my music technology as well
in order to get the students more engaged, give them an authentic, genuine learning experience and to give them skills that
they can then leave school with. They might not have a career in music, but at least they can set up a studio at home. They
will know how to use that gear, and they can engage in music for the rest of their lives.

The CHAIR — Could you give us some examples of some of those exciting things that are happening that you might be
aware of?

Mr PEAK — There is a particular organisation called the Tech Production Network that has made contact with a lot of
the schools in Mildura. Ben Browne from Merbein was talking about Tech Production Network, and I went out to Merbein
and saw what he was offering. It is basically a website that students log into. It has got all the resources and lesson plans,
and I cannot really explain it, because I have not actually got it yet.

Mr WILLIAMS — You have seen a demo.

Mr PEAK — I have seen a demo.

Mr WILLIAMS — It is just a huge online resource with MP3 files to listen to with some text explaining what you are
listening to. From my point of view, doing audio engineering you might teach a topic like equalisation and hearing all the
different frequency ranges of sound. The kids will have that on their computer screen. They will have an MP3 of a bass
drum that they can listen to with not enough base frequency in it, and then they will be shown how to pull that out and fix it
up. Then there is another example of a bass drum that has been EQ’d with the correct frequencies. Exercises and quizzes for
the students to take part in reinforce that knowledge that they have just acquired. It is just a very useful supplementary
resource to what we do in a practical sense in the classroom.

Mr PENNA — The advantages of the technology are that students can progress at their level. In a 7–10 situation we will
get a student come in and they have already learnt piano or guitar for four or five years. You put them into the Year 7
program, which is just at a general level. If you have the online resources, and they are costly too, you can let them sit and
work through the levels where they are at.

Mr WILLIAMS — In my program I can have a diverse number of things going on at one time in the one classroom
depending on who needs what. One student might need extra work on their theory, so using technology they can be just
doing extra work on hearing melodies or something. Another student might be needing extra work in another area. You can
have three or four different topics going on with technology, and students tend to engage with technology fairly easily. That
is one of the main things I use it for. I use it for custom learning plans for each student in the one classroom, whereas years
ago the lesson was delivered and everyone had to be on the same page with it. In my course you can be on different pages
as long as we all get to the same outcome at the end as per the study designs.
The CHAIR — What would your comments be in terms of community and local industry engagement and opportunity for students to perform in the community? Would you say that kids are well supported and that there are great opportunities locally, or that there needs to be more?

Mr PENNA — There are opportunities there, but they are also reliant on us to provide the spark for them to go and take those opportunities up. I am a brass specialist. There is a brass band and there are orchestras and things like that, but it comes back to the individual teacher to try to get them out there and to be passionate about getting them out into the community. At times in this district over the years that I have been here that passion has not been there from some of the teachers. They are not going out, they are just going into the school environment. That has limitations. There have been things trialled with some of the community groups to get performances up and going and they have been successful at times, but they have dropped off.

Mr WILLIAMS — Currently FReeZa is putting out more.

Mr PEAK — I went to that last night. They are really trying to push that.

Mr PENNA — The opportunities are out there. It is just that the uptake can be slow, depending on whatever the student’s standard is.

The CHAIR — Is there anything that you wanted to add that we have not covered?

Mr WILLIAMS — No, I do not think so.

Mr PEAK — Not that I can think of right now.

The CHAIR — I want to take the opportunity to thank you for coming in and appearing before the committee today. It is really refreshing to hear what is going on out in your schools, and it certainly helps us in terms of gathering evidence to come up with some recommendations on how we can advance things. Thank you very much, and good luck with what you continue to do.

Witnesses withdrew.