CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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

Melbourne — Tuesday, 28th May 2013

Members

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Mr David Price
Mr Ken Owen, Director, Musical Futures Australia
The CHAIR — I just wanted to begin by, firstly, welcoming David to the inquiry, to Melbourne and to Victoria. I’m looking forward to hearing a bit about what you’ve been involved in in the various programs. Also to Ken. Welcome to you, again.

I need to point out just a couple of things. Before I do that, I’ll just introduce my colleagues who you have just met. Gayle Tierney, who is the Deputy Chair, Nazih Elasmar and Peter Crisp. Elizabeth Miller will be popping in shortly.

In terms of the way today works is, you can see we are recording via Hansard today. You will have an opportunity to review that, and make any corrections that are necessary. Also I need to point out the evidence you give today is covered by what we call parliamentary privilege. It’s the same privilege afforded to members of Parliament. That only applies to the hearing proper, not what may have been said outside of the hearing.

So, we might get straight into it. We’ve got a number of questions. We will give you an opportunity, if you like, to kick it off and just give us a little bit about your experiences, particularly in developing the Music Futures programme in the UK and the impact that that’s had there and also particularly on education as a whole as well. So, over to you. We will give you a few minutes to do that, and then we will fire off with some other questions.

Mr PRICE — I work as a freelance education consultant, but I also am a senior associate at the Innovation Unit in London which used to be part of the Department of Education, but it’s a social enterprise. I’ve led a number of projects which have actually originated from Musical Futures.

Musical Futures started in 2003 and it was funded the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, which is a charitable trust in England. It was meant to be a three-year action research project which really began with the simple question which had emerged from research which had been done in 2000 which was why is the most popular cultural activity for young people the least popular subject in school, because not just in the UK, but also in the US, Germany and a number of other countries, when students have a choice, music is the least opted for subject. It was about 7% at the time in the UK.

Musical Futures really sought to address that issue by engaging students, but we quickly realised that it needed to be sustainable. So, all of our activities and all of our energies has been spent trying to change the practice of music learning in the classroom, which meant, effectively, re-training teachers.

We started with about 40 schools in 2003, doing experimental innovation work, and it’s now at the point where it’s in over 2000 high schools in England, which is about 60% of all high schools. But, the program has also been developed in Singapore. There’s a government funded program running there now. There are programs in Brazil, Canada, Scotland and Northern Ireland, Wales and of course, in Australia.

I just really wanted to make three points which perhaps explains some of its success. The first is that partly because it was funded by a charitable trust we established an open source policy right from the beginning, so all of the resources that we produced and anything which has been subsequently produced by teachers, is free. It’s not just free at cost, it’s also copyright free. Practitioners are encouraged to amend, change, adapt, and that will always be the case. That was part of Paul Hamlyn’s commitment to it.

The second thing is that I think we have now developed a kind of global community of music teachers who are involved in this, because obviously there are thousands of teachers all around the world who follow these approaches. It’s interesting I think that that community is now managed by a teacher in Gippsland at Trafalgar Primary School, who looks after it via social networking and the Internet.

And, I think the third thing is we have developed a structure of what we call Champion Schools and their teachers take responsibility for training other teachers. So, we create the resources with teachers
and the training now is done entirely by the teachers. So, that’s led to a kind of sustainability.

The actual programme in England now runs on the equivalent of 1.5 fulltime people. People assume that Musical Futures is this big organisation, and it’s not. I think that’s because of the structure that we’ve put in place and the fact that teachers are essentially running the program themselves. I think that really means now that the funding to cease — and it probably will at some point in the UK, although they’re now in the 11th year of funding — but, were it to cease, the program would continue.

What we found is that that percentage figure that we talked about, 7% of students who opt to take music when they have a choice in Musical Futures classrooms, goes up to anywhere between 30 and 40%. So, it’s about a four-fold increase. We’ve seen a four-fold increase in the demand for instrumental tuition from kids who get involved in Musical Futures. And, these figures, we’ve had a five-year evaluation by the Institute of Education in London, and these figures we’ve seen are actually replicated in other countries. So, we’re seeing a much greater engagement in music education. Part of my responsibility is to look at other countries in the world, and I think we feel that when you look at other countries in the way they have adapted it, I just feel there’s a tremendous potential in Australia for a program like Musical Futures.

The CHAIR — Okay, good. I just wanted to pick up on one thing you just said. So, your figures suggested a four-fold increase in people taking up instrumental tuition as a result of the programme.

Mr PRICE — Yes.

The CHAIR — And it’s predominately run in secondary schools, not primary schools?

Mr PRICE — Yes.

The CHAIR — And just a comment from you in terms of we’re hearing a lot in our inquiry that the earlier you get kids into music the better, and it seems to me that this is a really good program to give that generalist approach. Why was the strategy to start in secondary schools and why not earlier?

Mr PRICE — Purely and simply because the Paul Hamlyn Foundation had identified the age range of 11 to 19 as their primary concern.

I have to say, though, that for the first four years we focused entirely on high schools and it was Ben’s method, Trafalgar Primary, who sent me some videos of extraordinary work that his primary kids had done, which then forced us to say why aren’t we doing this at primary.

So, in the past three years we have now been taking some of those approaches into primary schools as well. So, it’s interesting that the Australian emphasis, which has moved us into the primary sector, but now we consider it to be primary and secondary.

The CHAIR — So, just on that, if someone was to start a program from scratch here where would be the ideal starting point for this? And, you’ve got limited funding. You can’t put it right across the board. Where do you start?

Mr PRICE — I think our experience is that you start with the teachers who are already in the classrooms. At the same time as Musical Futures we had a government led initiative which was called the Kids Stage III Strategy and we had a very large program called Creative Partnerships, which was in all schools and brought artists into the classroom. Our one took a different approach.

The other two programs have disappeared now; they are now no longer in existence. I think the reason why ours has survived is it spread from the bottom up: so we worked closely with the classroom teachers. That wasn’t always easy to get them to change the practice but in the long run it’s been the right strategy. So, I would start with the training of music teachers and the provision of resources.
Ms TIERNEY — We’ve heard evidence from a variety of people that the reason music education is not provided in schools is because of curriculum crowding. That’s one example. But, also, that there is a degree of autonomy that is afforded in schools now so the schools have just got that sheer choice about whether they offer it or not.

So, what are your views on the issues of curriculum crowding and school autonomy, and how can the government encourage schools to devote more time to teaching music?

Mr PRICE — We’re in an interesting situation now in the UK where because of the development of the English baccalaureate the Arts have been, to a certain extent, put under more pressure than they’ve ever had, and music has always been a compulsory subject in the curriculum from 5 to 14.

So, personally, of course you would expect me to say this: I’m a strong advocate of the Arts and of music in particular. I just think that any country which seeks to develop well rounded individuals who can develop their creative capacities needs to keep arts at the forefront of the curriculum. Sorry, the second part of your question?

Ms TIERNEY — About school autonomy.

Mr PRICE — Yes, one of the interesting things we have seen with the devolvement of funding to schools in the UK has been that a number of schools who got involved in Musical Futures took a conscious decision that instead of bringing in instrumental tuition for a small number of kids, what is sometimes — demeaningly — called ‘three kids in a cupboard’ but you know, the instrumental model — some principals have taken a conscious decision and said ‘We’ll take that money, but we’ll bring music to more students into the classroom’. Sometimes it’s some Musical Futures programs and other times not, but we will have them work with the whole class, because one of our concerns as an initiative was that we originally started actually as an extracurricular activity, but if you believe in universality and every kid having the opportunity to experience music, then the curriculum is the one place where you are going to get almost all of the kids.

So, I think the autonomy is important and has probably largely now in terms of education been a success. But, I think there have been some funds in the UK which people would have preferred to have been ring fenced, to being kept within the Arts, because inevitably some schools choose to use that money elsewhere.

Mr ELASMAR — From your perspective, what do you believe are the key reasons why schools should teach music as part of the curriculum?

Mr PRICE — Naturally, one is always influenced by your own experiences, but for me music was — the one thing as I grew up as a student — the one thing that made me want to go to school. And, I see this time and time again now with Musical Futures, that often we need to tap into — kids are becoming more disengaged with schools, with learning in general. And, the Arts and particularly music, can tap into some of their passions, and in many cases give them a reason to come to school that they never had before.

So, we’ve seen, for example, in Musical Futures schools that they attended school on days that Musical Futures has been done. So, you know, there are all sorts of studies which have been done which link music and abilities in mathematics. There’s those kinds of utilitarian reasons for doing music, but for me, it’s an important part of any kind of self expression and developing well rounded, creative individuals, who can express themselves.

What we’re seeing now in the UK is particularly with the rise of youth unemployment as we see right throughout Europe, there are more pressures now on young people I think than ever before and music offers them that ability to give vent to their feelings and their expressions.
The CHAIR — David, many of the stakeholders we have spoken to thus far have sort of held up the UK model as being something that has really obviously transformed and changed things in terms of music education. What do you think we could learn, or policymakers could learn here in Victoria, particularly in sort of getting things really going on the basis of what you’ve done?

Mr PRICE — I think it’s been really interesting to look back now in hindsight, because during the Blair Government there was probably more government support for the Arts, and particularly music, that there has ever been — certainly than there is now. Obviously, we’re into austerity measures. But, it seems to me that some of that has stuck and some of it, because it was unsustainable, has gone by the board now.

We had a program which was called Wider Opportunities, which sought to develop whole class instrumental tuition. And, it was in response to the then Secretary of State, David Blunkett, his statement that every child will have access to a year’s free instrumental tuition. I think we have learnt now that the solutions to widening access to kids are only partly about opening the doors. That programme was unsustainable, and couldn’t be scaled so that every child literally could have that exposure.

What we learnt was during that one year — which is what we got — the investment was massive. But, partly because it was a primary school program and there weren’t the trained primary teachers, you just had generalists, at the end of that year they had what people now describe as the wider opportunity slump, which was the access was taken away. I think the lesson that we took from that was that you had to support classroom teachers to make sure they had the skills to continue that.

More broadly, though, there’s no question that they were — looking back at that — they were almost the glory days of arts education. I think some of the better work still remains, and what we’ve tried to do with Musical Futures is to keep some of that momentum going.

But, there is no question we made some mistakes in the UK. If you look a little bit below the rhetoric, I think we see there was a naiveté about the solutions that we’ve seen.

The CHAIR — So, just on that, could you maybe tell us a little bit more about where it was back in the Blair days, the pre Musical Futures, and in particular, what you were starting from, because again, if I go back to where we are currently now, where we have an issue particularly in the primary school sector of not having access to music education, how did that sit in the UK, was it such a problem, and what would you be suggesting we look at to get more of this sort of early stage music education through our system, in an affordable and scalable manner?

Mr PRICE — Yes. If we had an easy answer to that one we wouldn’t be meeting here. I think the situation then going back to kind of pre — and it was around about 2001, 2002, we had probably a very similar situation to what you have here. We had not trained generalists. The average — and it’s still the case now — a primary teacher in pre-service training spends eight hours understanding music, so if you’re a generalist, what can you achieve in eight hours? Not a great deal.

So, we looked elsewhere for solutions. What we also had, though, was the irony I think of — you know, I’ve said our inspections agency did a review of music in the primary and also in the secondary and found that actually primary kids were enjoying music even though it was being taught by a non-specialist, more than they were in the secondary sector, when it was being taught by a specialist.

So, there was, I think, an issue around the actual pedagogy, the teaching approach which would be involved, which was always that historically music was taught as an academic subject rather than a practical, hands-on, music making subject.

So, I think in the UK there were two initiatives which started to change that. The one which was very
successful at primary was a program called Sing Up, which sought to bring singing activities into every primary school, for obvious reasons. The generalist could pretty much manage and continue after the specialist had left. And then, you know, as I said, started it in secondary. Musical Futures was able to tap into people’s passions.

We also had, which I believe you probably have here as well — there was a drop off in the uptake of instrumental tuition, and I think that was partly because when kids go through that transition process between primary into high school, there are all sorts of social effects going on in their lives. But, you know, we did have some — I suppose the kindest way to describe it was sort of an elitist position within secondary schools. The secondary teachers were the specialists, and they weren’t acknowledging kids had had some musical experiences beforehand.

So, one of the maxims you often hear secondary teachers in England say is, ‘No keyboards for Christmas.’ In other words, don’t allow the kids any access and teach them the theory and the technical skills before they are allowed to make music. Musical Futures in a sense was a bit of a shock to that system, because it’s 100% practical. And, I think that accounts for some of our success and some of the resistance that we saw earlier on.

I believe that music has to be a participatory, hands-on, experience through which you learn the academic skills. You learn it through the practice of music making. And, I think that’s probably the big change that, you know, the Blair Government was able to achieve, that there was more practical music making going on in schools.

The CHAIR — And just on that, when it was first introduced did you get any pushback from the specialists, and could you talk a little bit more about that, because we have heard already a few specialists were a bit reticent about having these sorts of programs coming in.

Mr PRICE — I used to go to conferences of instrumental teachers and, you know, I was not welcomed there. But, I used to say ‘Do you want to continue working with only the kids who are deemed to be gifted and talented or the parents are wealthy enough to be able to afford instrumental tuition?’ And, I don’t think any practitioners really do.

What I was able to say after a few years was — because their argument to me was ‘If these kids are helped to teach themselves how to play musical instruments there is going to be no demand for our service’. Now, after six years of evaluation, we can point to a fourfold increase in the demand for their services, and it’s simply because if a kid becomes highly engaged then they are going to reach a point where their enthusiasm isn’t enough and they will need some specialist input, at which point they have the need for those instrumental tutors.

So, I can understand that you’re getting that reaction. I would encourage you to keep that in perspective, that if these people were to actually start from what the students were actually interested in and re-engineer their services, to tap into those passions, and to tap into programs like Musical Futures, then they would find the number of students would rise and not fall, as it is in the UK.

Mr CRISP — The committee understands that you travel extensively as part of your role. Are there any international models or approaches to music education that you believe would be relevant to this inquiry?

Mr PRICE — Yes. You are probably familiar with the El Sistema model. We have now got a very successful program with that in Scotland. But, again, it’s interesting, that was a government led initiative which was being championed by someone from the classical music field who saw it as a way to promote classical music, when, in fact, the original of El Sistema in Venezuela was a social development model which sought to keep kids away from getting involved in drug activities through music. But, that’s been a highly successful model.
I think, again, the commonality between the Musical Futures program and El Sistema is that you’re starting from an oral tradition with music. You’re not putting barriers in the way of kids. Those technical skills develop. The theory comes through the practice. And, as I said, the Sing Up model has been another successful model which has also like Musical Futures transferred internationally.

Ms TIERNEY — So, in your introductory remarks you mentioned that 60% of — is it all UK schools —?

Mr PRICE — UK — English high schools.

Ms TIERNEY — So, what was involved in the actual retraining of the teachers?

Mr PRICE — The model we adopted — we have been through various iterations of this — we have a daylong immersive activity for teachers which actually puts them in the position of learners. That’s then followed by an optional — we offer three other day long training experiences. That’s essentially it. We also have our Champion Schools open their doors to other teachers so we have open days where people can come and see it. But, we have a huge amount of online support which goes on which is provided by other teachers so they’re in contact with one another but also developing new resources all the time and the website is constantly being added to in terms of the resources.

But, we find, surprisingly, that the first day of training is usually the one that will persuade a teacher that they need to change their practice and then they start using our resources. So, it’s surprisingly efficient, I guess.

Ms MILLER — So, just following on from that, what are the essential elements for creating a successful music program within schools?

Mr PRICE — I believe that you need to do music with children and not to them. Too often in the past we have turned students off music in school programs because we see it as a kind of missionary activity that a teacher has a particular passion for a particular form of music. That’s not to say that these kids shouldn’t understand what that passion is and develop it, but I think partly because of the way teachers have been trained — which is a fairly narrow approach — they have not been able to respond to students’ changing needs.

So, the philosophy we adopted is we would start with their interests and built out from that. So sometimes Musical Futures, for example, is described as contemporary in a rock and pop program. It isn’t. We do classical music.

Ms MILLER — Are teachers receptive to that process?

Mr PRICE — Initially they were terrified, because they thought that they were being de-skilled, and what we were actually saying was no. But, we felt that there needed to be a kind of line drawn in the sand, that we had to shock them into a different kind of way of teaching. Initially that was challenging for them, but they also saw that their students were so engaged with this. And, it is also created a different dynamic because when you say to a teacher ‘You don’t have to be the expert in every musical style but you can support your students through your general musical skills and also the students can teach you’.

Ms MILLER — And what timeframe did that transition occur over?

Mr PRICE — We used to talk about the thing that we called the six week wobble, which was our shorthand term for the point at which teachers would feel that perhaps the kids were getting too excited. It’s a very strong concept, I accept, but that these kids were almost too engaged with the music. But, at that point — beyond that point, once they settled into that this is a new form of pedagogy, it’s a new way of teaching, and you can let the students lead some of this learning, they
generally relax.

And, what we found, for reasons which we came to understand later, was that newly qualifying teachers, this perhaps wasn’t the right kind of program for them, that they needed a much more structured approach. But, what we found much more exciting was that the average age of teachers who had been doing Musical Futures, their length of time in the profession is about seven to eight years, and the reason behind that, as the researchers told us, was that, frankly, they had gotten bored, and this was a new way of working. It reinvigorated them and changed their practice in the classroom.

The CHAIR — Any downsides, things that we could learn say if you did it again, do it differently?

Mr PRICE — We have done it so many times. I mean, the good thing about Musical Futures in terms of taking it into other countries is that as a lot of the development work, a lot of the expensive mistakes have been made and we have learnt from. Yet, the obvious one was we shouldn’t have restricted this to high schools, we should’ve started at primary schools, but we’re now doing that work. But, because we have got this global community now of music teachers we were able to move it forward now and not with an English or even a UK perspective, but internationally.

So, currently we’re doing some work around singing and music technology and we’ve got teachers from Canada and Singapore who are all feeding into that process. So, that’s one lesson.

I think we could have offered better resources at an earlier stage, but it was important for us to develop those resources and then refine them.

The thing that we’ve learnt now over the latest initiative is that teachers, we found, will be energised if they are part of the design process. If you present a fait accompli to them then they are less likely to take it on. And also, I used to present to teacher forums, and I’m not a teacher — actually I am, tomorrow I’m teaching at Lalor North, but they would say ‘But you’re not working in the school and it can’t be this solution to everything’. And, it isn’t. We never say Musical Futures replaces the formal learning that you’ve been doing, but what we say is this will reach some of the kids who have been turned off by some of what you’ve been doing.

So, I think providing the resources has been really important, but actually we learnt that you need to grow a community of practitioners, which we do. We all get together now every Wednesday on Twitter. So, we’ve got music teachers from all around the world who get together and share their experiences. We have this video resource where we are now seeing teachers who will record everything, warts and all, that their students are doing, and they’re happy to share it and get advice from other practitioners from around the world. So, it’s gone from being a very small, domestic action research project, to this much broader, let’s share what we’re doing and see what we can learn from it.

The CHAIR — Ken, I know you have spoken to us before, but in terms of rolling this out in Victoria, just remind us the amount of dollars and the reach in terms of your program.

Mr OWEN — We’re using the same model of professional development for teachers, that’s an introduction, a supported implementation, and we’re doing as much as we can now in kind of almost a voluntary capacity, but with professional development — but, we think the cost of four teachers per annum to four to five years to implement the same model, with a sustainable model. Because we had the benefit of all the resourcing and development and then our pilot implementation, so to create a sustainable culture and learning we’re not talking about a lot of money, just the opportunity to give it to teachers.

When teachers come to a PD day the principal goes, ‘Well, how much is that going to cost me? I’ve got to replace that teacher and I need the school to pay the money.’ I guess some of the money we see could probably replace that replacement teacher — it’s nearly $300 a day — would make the principal’s choice much easier. And then, our organisation already has the Champion Schools in place
geographically, but we’re just not quite at the critical mass with the implementation. We don’t have a coordinating, organising publicity body to develop the teaching networks. It’s a ground up approach isn’t it, David?

**Mr PRICE** — Yes. And, we found after the initial training that you asked about, it’s helpful to have someone at the end of a phone or someone who can make visits to support and make sure that, you know, the practice is actually changing and it’s still encouraging students. We operate now nationally on around about $300 000 a year.

**The CHAIR** — How much does that came from the Foundation?

**Mr PRICE** — That’s entirely from the Foundation.

**The CHAIR** — Have you explored here any Foundation support, any private money support?

**Mr OWEN** — Yes, indeed. We have a small amount of money from the NAM Foundation in US the through the Australian Music Association, through association with Musical Product Division. And, we continue to explore that in these difficult times I guess, to get us — along with these sort of forums.

**Mr PRICE** — But the sustainability of the model is because teachers are training other teachers, and that we’re not bringing in expensive practitioners. I do believe that it works better if you can use instrumental teachers in the classroom.

**Mr OWEN** — Absolutely.

**Mr PRICE** — That supports what the classroom teacher is trying to do, but I don’t think it works by — in fact, we did that in the early stages of Musical Futures, we brought freelance musicians into the classroom and it just wasn’t scalable; too expensive.

**Mr OWEN** — We sort of don’t need extra resources. All the things we need are already at schools, the teachers, the instruments, the classrooms, so we don’t need extra of anything, really. We just need the time of teachers to change the teacher and student practice.

**Mr PRICE** — One of the great things that I see now in schools is that teachers are realising that the students are the best resources they’ve got. So, if you’ve got, you know, a Year 11 or Year 12 student who comes in to work with the Year 8 student, they are far closer, the age range of the student, you know, and the student can aspire to be that kind of musician. There’s a greater amount of skill there in our student body which hitherto hadn’t been tapped into.

**The CHAIR** — We have concluded our questions. Is there anything we may not have covered that you wanted to say?

**Mr PRICE** — I suppose the only thing I would really want to say is that I now work across the curriculum. I have to say that in my experience the most conservative group of educators I’ve ever met have been musicians. They are hard to shift. They tend to believe — and I’ve seen this particularly in the US — they have a model of provision in America which has not changed for over 100 years. And, they tend to guard their domains very tightly. But, the world’s changed so much, and we have to be much more accountable to students’ interests. They have to recognise that they also have to change.

So, I would just urge you to consider the kind of vested interests who want to keep things as they are, will ensure that music remains a minority subject unless some of those monopolies are challenged.

**The CHAIR** — Ken, do you have anything to add?
Mr PRICE — No, my only comment I think is we are enjoying working with teachers from the ground up program. I think sustainability is the thing that is so rewarding and important for this issue. It’s something that does not need to be funded forever to make a change.

The CHAIR — Okay. Thank you very much, both of you, for coming in, and particularly David for coming down and being part of this, and good luck with the rest of the work that you have been doing.

Mr PRICE — Thank you.

The CHAIR — Thank you to the committee members for making your time available during a parliamentary week, and for the staff for setting it all up.

Witnesses withdrew.