CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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

Mildura — 2 May 2013

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Witnesses

Ms J. Galloway, District Instrumental Music Teacher,
Mr A. Pusz, District Instrumental Music Teacher,
Ms A. MacGregor, Instrumental Music Teacher, Trinity Lutheran College and St Joseph’s College,
Ms A. McGann, Instrumental Music Teacher, Mildura South Primary School,
Ms M. Sullivan, Instrumental Music Teacher, Sacred Heart Primary School,
Ms A. Smith, District Instrumental Music Teacher, and
Mr M. Hennig, District Instrumental Music Coordinator
The CHAIR — We might make a start. Firstly, I wanted to thank you for joining us here today to give evidence before the Education and Training Committee about the very important area of music, which I know you are all very passionate about.

These lovely microphones here are not for vocal purposes, singing purposes, but feel free to have a go if you like, just to encourage that relaxed mood, which is what we are trying to do. I know it looks a bit formal in the way that it is set up, but we do not mean it to be that way. The purpose of these microphones is for recording of the evidence by Hansard. You will have the opportunity to review the transcript and make any amendments that need to be made. I will come back to how we use the microphones in a minute.

Also, the evidence you give us is covered by parliamentary privilege, which is the same privilege afforded to members of Parliament. That means that you can feel free to say whatever you like in here; you are protected through that privilege. But that only applies to the hearing proper. As I say, it is really about hearing from you, about strategies and what is happening within your schools, and particularly what we can do to promote and encourage better music programs throughout our schools in Victoria. So we are really keen to hear from you. We have got a number of questions that we are going to ask, but please do not feel like you have to answer every one of them. There might be a question that really applies to you and your school and we are keen to hear that. We will give you an opportunity later on to maybe ask something or give some further information about what you are doing.

Two other things. When you speak could you please just give us your name each time, just for the purposes of Hansard. So if it is Jo, say ‘Jo’, and then straight into whatever comment you want to make. The other thing is that because we have only got a limited amount of microphones just before you are about to make that contribution if you could just grab the base of the microphone and move it in your direction so we can then make sure that that is all covered. What we might do is just quickly go through and get a quick introduction of who you are and what school you are from, and tell us something about your music program so we have that going. We are going to kick it off with you, Annette.

Ms SMITH — Annette Smith, with the Mildura Senior College as an instrumental music teacher. I travel to four schools and teach brass, woodwind, guitar and bass in that time. I have been doing this job for probably 16 years, and before that I was doing instrumental music in primary schools and secondary schools but not on a full-time basis. I usually just have instrumental lessons through the day with groups of one to five. It would be different instruments.

The CHAIR — And, maybe, within the school program or outside or both?

Ms SMITH — Just within the school program, and I probably run ensembles after school or lunchtimes with that as well.

The CHAIR — Thank you. Marcus?

Mr HENNIG — My name is Marcus Hennig. I am the Instrumental Music Coordinator for the district for the public schools. In our department we have six staff, of which Annette is one, and Jo and Aleks are here too. We take care of Chaffey Secondary College, Merbein P–10, Irymple Secondary College, Red Cliffs Secondary College and Mildura Senior College. Currently we have about 247 students enrolled in our program. There are about 14 ensemble rehearsals we do per week. I also teach guitar, and I have been doing this job for about 10 years now.

The CHAIR — Just very quickly, the budget which you have that goes to the schools, are you aware of that?

Mr HENNIG — Yes, the budget is a staffing budget, so we employ as many instrumental staff as we possibly can out of that budget, and then the surplus is picked up by participating schools.

The CHAIR — How many would that be in this region?

Mr HENNIG — Five.

The CHAIR — Excellent; thank you. Alison?

Ms McGANN — I am Alison McGann, and I teach instrumental music at Mildura South Primary School. I also have several private students at St Jo’s and Chaffey and outside of school, but Mildura South is my main school. I have 45 kids there and teach them everything except singing and guitar; we have a guitar teacher and a singing teacher who deal with that. I run most of the ensembles. The big ensembles, choir and the band. That is what I do.
Ms SULLIVAN — My name is Meg Sullivan, and I am associated with Sacred Heart Primary School. Three years ago I went in there and offered to teach piano. I have been a private piano teacher since I was about 18, so I have had a lot of experience. I just noted that my grandchildren were starting at the school and there was not much in the way of music there. Since I have been there I think there has been a lot of interest generated. There is now a classroom music teacher who runs a program. I have taken two choirs for the last three years. I started off three years ago with five students for the whole year. Last year I had 15. I now have 27. Some of those students had never heard an acoustic instrument before they heard piano. I got them a piano and put it in there because a lot of children had never heard other instruments, and that really shocked me.

The interest in the choir is really good. There are lots of children that, if they do not have access to this sort of education, get lost in the system because at lunchtime they are hanging around the library, they are not sporty and they are not interested in outdoor activities. I find that since I have been there lots of parents who probably could not afford it because — —

I actually bill the parents directly. It is nothing to do with the school — the funding — and there are lots of parents would like their children to learn but do not have the funds. Then I have a few children who started with me. Their parents had businesses go broke, so I am sort of offering a few scholarships, but I cannot afford to do much of that.

Ms SULLIVAN — My charge-out rate is $60 an hour, and I am a Victorian Music Teachers Association fully fledged member, which means I could charge a minimum of $66, but I just keep it at a flat rate of $60, and I have done so for the last about seven or eight years. I have not put the fees up, because I find the need is there and I would rather promote the music, but it does not pay that well.

Ms SULLIVAN — I think the children who come to me enjoy the lessons. They play at assemblies, and I have entered them in the eisteddfod. The eisteddfod is a wonderful venue here for showcasing the talent. It is just that they have seen what you can do. Nowadays children do not even see a CD; it is all iTunes. The music is not like grassroots music. It is something remote. That is what I think.

Ms GALLOWAY — My name is Jo Galloway. I am part of the instrumental music team that Marcus Hennig described before. I have been teaching in schools for 20 years and in this job in Mildura for 10 years. Adding to what Meg was saying, I am finding that I get a lot of kids who are not engaged in their school across the board. I am finding that students are getting re-engaged by getting involved in the instrumental music program. It improves the rest of their studies. They are kids who are often from backgrounds where no-one else has studied a musical instrument, and they feel very special by doing that. I just think it is a really important part of their education. If you quote someone like Fred Watson, he is an astronomer who talks about music being a sophisticated form of science and mathematics. I am finding it to be a very important part of a student’s education.

Mr PUSZ — I am Aleks Pusz. I am the percussion and drum kit teacher in the same program that Jo, Marcus and Annette mentioned. I teach at all the five schools. I am employed as a percussion teacher, but due to the funding level of the schools I am basically a drum kit teacher. I try to teach them the knowledge if I do not have the actual gear.

Mr HENNING — I will kick off with the first question. We have heard that rural and regional schools can sometimes find it difficult to deliver music education. What is your assessment of the quality of programs and the availability of school music education in the Mildura region, and what strategies can you suggest to improve the delivery of music education to students in regional areas?

Mr HENNING — I will kick off. I think this region is extremely lucky in that we have been able to pool instrumental teachers from a number of areas. I know, for example, that Aleks, Jo and I have come from South Australia. Jo has also taught in WA. We were all approached by influential people in the district to come and move here for job prospects. We have a lot of knowledge — someone like Annette teaches across five instruments — so, collectively, my team is extremely knowledgeable in a lot of disciplines. We do not offer everything, because we cannot afford it. For example, I know that we have a lot of students at Mildura Senior College who go to Meg for piano because we just cannot offer piano in the program. We do not have the funding to do so.
Regarding opportunities for the kids, we have a lot of different ensembles that cater for everything from rock bands to the stage band that we have here. We have quite a good stage band in the district. Regarding opportunities for teachers in rural areas, we are quite remote. We are not really involved with any other groups except for ourselves, so professional development opportunities come at a cost. To fly down to Melbourne and stay overnight, we are forking out $400-plus per person to do so. A lot of these opportunities are found within metropolitan areas, and we just do not have them. The quality of the teachers is good. The opportunity to do more professional development would be better; it would be great.

Ms GALLOWAY — I am finding that with us teaching alongside the classroom music teachers we are trying to add to their program, but students are lucky if they get a semester or two of music, which is a language. It is not something you can do for just one semester and pick up in two years time. It is a language. They get only one or two semesters in four years, and then they are expected to pick it up in Year 11 and do a VCE subject. Unless students have had the privilege or the opportunity to learn through private lessons — not lessons necessarily — or theory and all that sort of stuff, it is very hard for them to be extremely successful in their VCE studies. Music being an industry that is widening all the time, there are lots of jobs and career pathways into the film industry and multimedia. It is a big industry and worth a lot of money to Australia. I think that music in schools needs to be more of a core subject so that we can actually add to this core subject rather than it being fairly ad hoc in terms of how often kids get to study it.

Mr HENNIG — I will add to that. It seems to me that the curriculum has changed considerably as far as the basics of music education are concerned, and that is what Jo is talking about too. We have a lot of changes to VET-type courses as well to accommodate those kids who would no longer be engaged in a VCE-type syllabus. We also have a system here where we have a senior college. We have Red Cliffs Secondary College, which offers Year 7 to Year 12, but we also have a senior college that tackles Years 11 and 12, and the transition from Year 10 to Years 11 and 12 is quite often where we lose it. We lose the kids. They may not have the background to come in and do that VCE-type subject. The theoretical aspect of it has definitely changed from what we did, and a lot of them find it quite difficult to jump straight into the VCE subject.

The CHAIR — Is that where VCAL can potentially sit?

Mr HENNIG — Yes, VET contributes to about half of the study in Years 11 and 12. It is probably a 50-50 split between VCE music and the VET technical type of music. Annette might be able to talk about Red Cliffs a little bit more.

Ms SMITH — VCAL is probably an area that has not really been tapped into with music at all. I do not know of many who are in VCAL and doing music.

Mr HENNIG — We are starting to see a bit of a trend into FLO — flexible learning options — types of programs. This year I have picked up three groups in the district that are basically about student engagement. We are not concentrating on marks or tertiary scores; for these kids we are offering music just as a means to keep them at school and attending. The kids are very diverse. They come from a lot of different backgrounds. It is about fun and not necessarily about marking them as such. That is the FLO program, which is now a new buzz program that is along the lines of VCAL.

Ms McGANN — I want to add from the early years point of view that not all the state schools have a music program up and running up here, so a lot of kids when they get to high school have no idea about music. As Meg was saying, they have not seen an acoustic instrument, they do not know how they work and they do not know if they can learn it. They assume that you need some sort of prior knowledge, so there are a lot of kids who could but are not picking up music in Year 7, because they have not had that early years exposure to it. I think that needs to be addressed.

Ms SULLIVAN — Also I have noticed in my work over the last 30 years in primary schools that the programs, like Jo said, are not continuous. The funding might go for a couple of years. I remember that St Paul’s used to have fantastic disadvantaged school funding, as it used to be called, but that ran out, so both the junior music teacher and I were let go. We had fantastic things working through the school, and it was for about 10 years that I was there. The funding is intermittent, and therefore the tuition is too in the music area. I am talking about classroom music.

The CHAIR — Before we ask Gayle to ask her question, Alison, welcome. Earlier we just went through and gave people the opportunity to quickly introduce themselves, tell us what school they are from and what sort of programs they are running within the school. Do you want to quickly talk about you?

Ms MacGREGOR — I teach strings in the district. I started teaching privately responding to a need — just people asking. I am a scientist, so it is kind of a hobby that has got out of control. I then moved into one of the private schools because I had enough students to warrant it moving into the school for a day to free up night space for more kids. Recently I started at a second private school as well. The schools that I teach at are Trinity and St Joe’s.
The CHAIR — Is that after school, out of the classroom?

Ms MacGREGOR — They are the schools that I am associated with.

The CHAIR — In classrooms?

Ms MacGREGOR — No. I am just a peripatetic; the staff do not really know me. I just breeze in and out kind of thing. You do not really feel a great connection with the school, which is tricky in a way. The rest of the students that I have are private. I totted it up this morning, and I have 31 students at the moment.

Ms TIERNEY — As instrumental music teachers in a regional setting, what are the specific issues that you face that you feel you need to let the committee know, as opposed to metro?

Mr HENNIG — As you are probably aware, there have been some recent changes to VIT registration for paraprofessionals. I do not think anyone at this table is a qualified teacher. We have all — —

Ms MacGREGOR — I am.

Ms SULLIVAN — Two.

Mr HENNIG — Okay, two. My entire team are on permission to teach, which means that we have studied music, but we have not actually studied classroom teaching, because we do not really have any interest in it. We are musicians, and that is the course we have charted so far.

The problem that we have in the regional areas at the moment with the VIT registration aspect is that they are ruling that instrumental teachers no longer require registration. The problem with that is that the schools can no longer put us on a payroll. The roles themselves are advertised under a teacher category because we have duty of care of students, we take ensembles et cetera. The problem in this area for the district is that there are not a lot of instrumental teachers out there. They cannot find classroom teachers who are specialist music teachers. The other problem for us is that we do not have access to bridging courses to be able to get the right qualifications to be able to get full registration as a teacher if we want to pursue that. We have specialists, we have very good people in the role, but we have a real issue at the moment with payroll when we reapply for contracts. We are being disadvantaged in one sense because we are not able to access the bridging qualifications, and the district is being disadvantaged because the pool of instrumental teachers here are not all qualified in instruments that we want. We are qualified in a classroom music sense; we are adequate for teaching instrumental. There is an issue, and we do not know what to do about it. Schools do not know what to do about it.

Ms TIERNEY — Yes. It is an issue we have heard a lot about. What are your views in terms of what a bridging arrangement might look at and the notion of recognition of prior learning and those things?

Mr HENNIG — To begin with, I am not quite sure why we are trying to turn instrumental teachers into classroom music teachers in the first place. If we look at it going backwards, if there were a classroom music teacher who had no prior real experience in instruments and wanted to do instrumental work, currently under the arrangements they would have more right in the education department’s view to secure a job as an instrumental teacher than someone who had 20-plus years of experience, had a degree in performing and had a proven track record.

The way I see it personally is that it is not necessarily that we need classroom teaching qualifications; we just need dimensions of work which will fit the job that we are doing. A lot of the schools are looking at an ES-type arrangement — this is from other districts, such as Bendigo, which we are closely matched to — but the problem with an ES class is that it does not actually fit our dimensions of work. It does not allow for reporting, it does not allow for prior preparation and those things, and then there is also a duty-of-care issue. If the dimensions of work were changed within some type of ES class, then potentially we could follow down that road or, as you said, there would need to be some recognition of prior service to allow us to obtain that permission to teach and that continual permission to teach. We have a brick wall with VIT at the moment; we cannot get through to them, and principals cannot get through to them. It is like they have washed their hands of it — cleaned it with soap.

Ms MacGREGOR — As someone who has never been involved in the education department as an employed teacher or anything, my observation from the outside is fully supportive of what Marcus has said. I cannot justify giving up what I call my day job to fully do music. I love music, I have never advertised, I have got a waiting list, there is plenty for me to do here but my income would more than halve if I relied on just music income based on the kinds of rates that come through
from a parent wanting to pay. My other job subsidises heavily what I do in music, and I am happy with that and I love it. I am at a point in my life where I want to do what I want and not just pay a mortgage.

But somebody coming into that industry, given the choice of living on that kind of an income with the kind of skills they have, you will never get new entrants coming in as school music teachers. They would be crazy. Every week I say, ‘Why am I doing that?’; and I have to remember it is because I love it. You will have no new entrants at all.

Ms GALLOWAY — I have got my Bachelor in Music Performance and, as I said, have been teaching and performing for over 20 years. At several times I have looked at doing a Graduate Diploma in Education, and for various reasons — babies and all that sort of thing — it has not happened. But the other aspect to it is also it is very hard to get specific training for what we do that backs up what we are doing. There is an online course you can do through Darwin, and there is one other one.

The other point that worries me is that I feel like I am at the end of my career path. I cannot go any further up. Even if I were to go and get qualified, and this would be for all the para-professionals, there is no money to actually pay us, so there would be no jobs. We are basically there, and even if we were to go and do the other qualification that everyone would prefer we had, there is no money.

Mr CRISP — Looking at the training needs for instrumental music teachers, are they being met by courses offered by universities and the VET sector? If not, what type of courses would you like to see?

Ms SMITH — I am a local person who has lived here all my life, and I have a family. I have not been able to move away for money reasons, because I do not have that opportunity. I have looked and looked for many years to get some sort of piece of paper, I suppose, for my abilities. I play a lot of instruments, and I do play them at a level that I can teach to VCE, but I do not have that piece of paper. Mostly you have to travel away — you have to go somewhere to do it. Even for the ones who have their performance degree, to go away and do the bridging that they are offering in Melbourne is still through the week — it is after work on weekdays. There is still no opportunity for us to do that. I suppose it is a hands-on thing, so you cannot do it online totally anyway. I have not had that opportunity. There are little things with, say, a diploma of music offering, but you still have to travel to be able to do it.

Ms SULLIVAN — In 1993 I graduated from La Trobe University and they sent lecturers up here from Bendigo. There were a lot of us that were three-year trained and wanted a fourth-year primary education degree. It was really successful. I think there were about 30 of us. It was spread over a year and we were able to do two subjects. They sent the lecturers up and the venue they used was the TAFE college. Then we did two in our own time. We had a study group and it was a really fantastic time to upgrade our qualification. I think it was 1991 or 1992, something like that — around that time, anyway. That was a really successful program that they did. That only lasted for a short time because the education department wanted the three-year trained people to have that fourth year and they had a big push.

Ms MILLER — I have a question about the parent contribution to instrumental music tuition. My question is seeking the views on how to ensure that the cost of participation in instrumental music programs does not create a barrier to accessing these programs.

Ms McGANN — Currently there is a massive barrier. I am not funded at all by my school; they have no provision. There is minimal funding, but it is mostly for equipment and photocopying — that sort of thing. The only students who can learn at Mildura South are the students whose parents feel that they can afford lessons — and that is the same for the guitar teacher and the same for the singing teacher. So that is the only music they get. They are fortunate and they get classroom music and they can join the choir, if they like, but if they want to learn instrumental music, their parents have to be able to afford it.

Ms MILLER — How much are we talking about?

Ms McGANN — I charge $22 for an individual lesson for half an hour and $15 for a group lesson for half an hour. So it is not ridiculously expensive, unless you are not earning enough money to afford it. It is sort of a catch 22. If I charge less, there is no provision for me — or my entire wage comes from parents paying for their children to have lessons. If I drop my prices, it affects how much money I am earning at the bottom line. I need to make sure I am charging what will keep me off the streets while I am not charging so much that it excludes too many people from having their lessons.

Ms MILLER — Is that across the district?
Mr HENNIG — It is different because Alison is on purely tuition; there is no subsidy at all for the schools that she is teaching in. The secondary colleges, the public school system, like I mentioned before, have a pool of money from which we employ the teachers most at need, which is not all of them. We could definitely do with a piano teacher, I can tell you that.

Ms GALLOWAY — And a violin teacher.

Mr HENNIG — Anyway, the shortfall is in the tens of thousands of dollars per school for the actual program itself and they subsidise that shortfall in money by charging students an administration fee. So it is nothing to do with the instrumental music department, but it is the school’s administration fee to try to recoup some of those costs. For example, there might be a hire of the instrument fee or there might be a flat fee for just joining the program, which might be something like $120 for the year. Even with that amount of money sometimes in a public school, where people see that education should be free, parents cannot afford that. It is a shame, because that is where some of our best work is done, in engaging these kids to come to school and picking up the ones who really do not have anything else. They cannot afford to join the football team or the other sports teams. They do not have any other interests there, but they have engaged with an instrument and then all of a sudden mum cannot afford the administration fee, never mind the private tuition fee, if they want to go down that path.

Ms MILLER — Annette, what about at your school in the senior college?

Ms SMITH — I do across the instruments. The guitar, because it is a cheaper version — they can either borrow one or someone down the road can lend them one — and $100 will get them started and they have that for however long they want to learn until they upgrade, which might be never, and they can just borrow the school instruments while they are doing their special performances. But with the brass and woodwind, there has to be a little bit more because we hire them. We have a great hire fee system through the Loddon Campaspe, which might only be $100 or $80 an instrument for the year. We do have to pay for the servicing, which could be another $200 or $300 a year, depending on what happens, so it can be quite expensive. The schools really need to cover themselves a little bit from that. Just this year I have had a few who find it very difficult and who have organised with their schools to pay for it through some sort of school funding. So a lot of them choose to do either singing or guitar because it is a cheaper version, which they might have wanted to do — —

I do not know if they wanted to play a brass instrument, but I wish they would because that is my thing; I love brass too.

Ms MILLER — At least it is a starting point, right?

Ms SMITH — That is true.

Mr PUSZ — I am also going to jump in here. Speaking as a percussion teacher, obviously I teach percussion instruments. Students can often find the cost of a drum kit prohibitive. I have many students who drop out after Year 10 because they still do not have a drum kit. I have had some very promising students drop out because they have not been able to afford an instrument.

I am also allegedly here as a percussion teacher. There is a course for VCE percussion that requires a mountain of gear. I believe across the five schools I teach at there is probably just enough gear to teach Year 12 VCE percussion. There is no way I could do it for one student because we would have to do one lesson at Chaffey for the timps and one lesson at Irymple to learn on the marimba and pull the stuff from three different schools to be able to play a piece for multiple percussion. There are kids out there who would do it; there are kids who are interested. I have one student in particular who loves playing percussion stuff — not just drum kit but all of it. But we just cannot do it. There is also another funding cost there that if the schools could be adequately resourced to teach this stuff, there are kids who would do it. But it is a large funding cost, I am well aware of that.

Mr HENNIG — I might just add to that. In our system at least we have some sort of process or a system that we can get instruments. We have a pool of instruments. The network that we work with in the Loddon region down near Bendigo, at Eaglehawk, they have a pool of instruments there. If we have the numbers and we have the will, we can usually get what we need, or some of what we need, unlike what Alison and the others are talking about; they are starting from nothing. At least there is a system in place for us. It is sort of limited, I guess.

Mr ELASMAR — It is clear that instrumental music teachers take on a significant amount of extracurricular work as part of their role. My question is: what strategies do you believe need to be put in place to support instrumental music teachers?
Mr HENNIG — I think because we are a department we have been able to write protocols to do this. We look at our timetable as being X amount of sessions per day of actually teaching and a preparation session. When we do external rehearsal sessions, we include them as part of a sessional teaching working load. Because we do not do yard duties or things like that, we have an arrangement and an obligation to attend as many external events as possible. We try to strike a balance between the external stuff versus how much face time, one on one or one to a group lessons that we do.

Currently we have 14 extra rehearsal sessions outside of normal class time in the district. That equates to something like 70-plus actual events last year of ensembles or individual students or eisteddfod playing. We have the benefit of being able to negotiate with schools and with the coordinating principal and the coordinator to strike a balance.

Ms McGANN — Being essentially self-employed the strategy is that I do not work when I cannot take the time off. In eisteddfod week I have 120 items being performed, so during that week none of my students get a lesson because I cannot physically be in two places at once. Being self-employed you have the advantage of being flexible. If something like eisteddfod comes up, you just do not teach. On the other hand, in the weeks leading up to eisteddfod, I do not get lunchtimes because there is no-one else who can take the ensembles that I teach or take the choir or run the band. It is a sort of trade-off between me giving up my time now for the sake of the kids doing well at eisteddfod or me just not entering the kids and them missing out.

Ms MacGREGOR — I have a question for Alison McGann. During eisteddfod week, when you are there with your 120 entries and as a consequence cannot teach, am I my right in thinking that means you also cannot earn an income?

Ms McGANN — Yes, I get no money for that week.

Ms MacGREGOR — I empathise with that. That is similar for me. There is a huge load of stuff that just happens that is not part of the chargeable curriculum that you offer. In answer to your question about what kind of support is available, before I started teaching, how I kind of got into it was I started a string group. Marcus gave me some good advice on that. I came in not really knowing where to begin. I started an ensemble and then that became a whole lot of students wanting to learn. I run that on nothing. I turn up and they turn up and there is no exchange of anything. It just happens.

I would love to think that there was funding. We have a million ideas about what we want to do; those kids there and all of these teachers would say the same thing. The kids they work with are so professional in what they do. They want to perform. I have done relief teaching. I have seen those kids in the classroom. They are ridiculous and feral and teenage and I wonder, ‘What happened to you?’ Because in the private lessons I have with them they are so mature and I have an adult relationship with them. In their normal classroom setting they behave very differently. They obviously value that music experience; it is very important to them in their personal development.

When I see them operating out of school and in these other environments as performers, it is just astonishing. You would just be blown away to see how sophisticated they are. We have a lot of ideas, amazing things we would like to do, but there is no budget. It is really hard. You apply for one thing or something else. But it would be really nice if there was a string of available grants so that we could build these programs. That would be great.

Ms GALLOWAY — I was just going to elaborate on what Alison was talking about. I find my piano students lack a lot of opportunities to perform. I have two piano students who are going to Melbourne to perform and complete their VCE piano performance. For me to rent out the Steinway at the arts centre would be somewhere in the vicinity of $100. Plus I also have to have $5 million insurance, which costs about $300 for one event.

What I did one year was I had a charitable organisation and I said, ‘Look, we’ll run it as a fundraiser but I won’t be able to raise any funds for you’. They said, ‘That’s fine’. So I used that advertising. Their insurance covered that. But the parents were already paying out a lot of money for the private tuition. Then I say to them, ‘Okay, you’re going to have to pay $50 each for this performance’. I have had it said to me, ‘I don’t need to come and hear my own child perform’. So I advertise widely, in the paper and everything, and I get about 50 or 60 people, and the people there are absolutely bowled over by the quality of the students’ performances. But I am always out of pocket from those occasions because the funding does not cover it and, like Alison said, the grants. What I am taking a long time to explain is that opportunities to perform cost a lot of money.

Ms TIERNEY — Marcus, right at the beginning you mentioned that yourself, Jo and Aleks had been poached from South Australia; is that right?

Mr HENNIG — Yes.
Ms TIERNEY — And you mentioned that there were some civic letters that might have been instrumental in all of that. How does that actually work, and why South Australia; why was it not Victoria or New South Wales? I just want to know a little bit more about that and then I want to talk about primary education.

Mr HENNIG — Yes. This all comes down to employment. The process of actually trying to find an instrumental teacher in our job is that we have to advertise on Recruitment Online, because it is a job that has all the benefits of holiday pay, superannuation and all those normal things that normal people get, but for a music teacher that is really attractive. We were all in similar roles to probably Alison and Alison, in the sense that we would have been teaching in private schools in South Australia et cetera. We had people who were already up here and who knew about us. When jobs were advertised and they could no longer find a successful candidate through Recruitment Online — once they have a teaching qualification, those people usually teach in the classroom because that is why they have got it — the call comes out and through word of mouth, ‘Yes, we know someone who can teach guitar’ and they are persuasive. We had to chase Aleks all over the country to get him here. We knew him from someone and then someone else and we were saying, ‘No. You really need to come up here’. ‘Oh, but I’m already doing this’.

Eventually we try to piece together our team through networking. Usually advertising on paper does not work. I do not know what to say, but maybe those people are not suitable for the program we are offering, because they may not have the experience. We want professional specialists. We want Annette Smiths, who can teach five instruments extremely well. Someone like that is extremely valuable to a music program. I do not know if anyone wants to add to anything to that.

Mr PUSZ — Can I jump in there? You asked specifically, ‘Why South Australia?’. The program that Marcus and I went through — at a, sadly, no longer existing music school — had a three-year subject called ‘Approaches to music education’. It was designed to make the graduates from that program able to teach studio music, which is what we do. As far as I am aware, there is not an equivalent program in any of the Melbourne universities. So this actually gets back to one of the very early questions about qualifications. Marcus and I are qualified for what we do. If we were in South Australia, we would be treated as proper teachers getting the 80 grand, or whatever it is, salary. So we are looking at this need to be qualified and we are saying, ‘We are qualified. It’s just that these people who live in Melbourne, VIT, have heard of the courses in Melbourne which don’t have the subject we’ve done’ and they are saying, ‘You’re not qualified’ because they just do not know. That is a good reason to pick someone like me or Marcus, because we are qualified.

Ms McGANN — My qualification is from Melbourne. I went to Melbourne University, the Conservatorium of Music, and then moved to Monash. Both those universities do not offer education as a specific. Every year you do a pedagogy class, which is why we get qualified with our permission to teach. But Melbourne is a bigger place. The people who study music in Melbourne tend to stay in Melbourne or go to Bendigo, Traralgon or Ballarat. I grew up in Bendigo. Mildura is a long way away. You would not move to Mildura for the fun of it.

I got a phone call from my brother-in-law, who was at the time a classroom teacher, saying, ‘Our flute teacher is pregnant. Can you please come up here and teach flute?’ I said, ‘Haven’t you got anybody else?’. He said, ‘No. We’ve had this job advertised’ — I think for six months at that point. My contract at the school I was teaching at in Bendigo had ended, so I moved up here. There are hundreds of kids here who want to learn music, so I have never been short of work, which is why I have stayed up here.

Mr HENNIG — I might just add something, too. The attractiveness about living in a rural area is that the cost of living is not as high as it would be in other areas. So even though it is far away and we do not have some of the access, the reason why Aleks, Jo, Annette and myself are staying here is that we like where we live. Do you know what I mean? From a Year 10 perspective and a coordinator’s perspective, we do not want a continual revolving door of people coming up and teaching for one year, developing relationships and then going. We like the fact that we have a team that is committed to staying here. We are more mature now; our rock days are over. Do you know what I mean? We are here and we are interested in community. We are interested in getting involved in eisteddfods and those kinds of things. After a while it appeals to you. The thought of having to move back to Adelaide to get a job, it is like: ‘I don’t really want to go back there’. They are the things you start to think about. Well, at the end of the day you have to go where the work is. We love Mildura — or I do.

Ms TIERNEY — PD obviously is very important to them.

Mr HENNIG — Yes.
Ms TIERNEY — In terms of primary school education, I am just assuming that you all agree that instrumental music programs need to be at primary school level. Okay, given that: at what point? At what year?

Ms McGANN — As far as I am concerned, prep. Get them started early.

Ms SMITH — I have actually been teaching in primary schools for probably about 27 years — just invited to teach a class with a teacher in the class with me. I started from prep through to Year 12. Some of the schools had some great xylophones and recorders and my aspect of looking at music education was always hands-on; the instrumental part of the lessons was always important. A lot of my students went through to secondary school and I had a breeze because they already knew the basics of music. If you go up there it is going to be higher and you come down and all that sort of thing, so I am thinking at the moment that except for Mildura South, which has an instrumental program, a lot of the other schools may have music but it is not hands-on instrumental — —

Ms GALLOWAY — It is not from lack of interest, either.

Ms SMITH — No, and I would say their music classes are probably based more around singing; I am not sure. We do not have that flow-through any more since I have not been doing it, in that role anyway, of the students having hands-on with a lot of instruments right through that whole six years.

Ms McGANN — I was going to say that even at Mildura South we are restricted, we are not allowed to teach below Year 3. We can only take the kids from Year 3 upwards. Anyone younger who wants to learn needs to sort it out as an out-of-school private venture.

Mr HENNIG — I think Meg said something really important at the start of this, and that is that she was the only one and she started with X number of students, which was not very many, and a few years later it has grown. It is really about individuals. A maths teacher teaches a maths curriculum. They may be in there with other people, another ten. There is usually only one music teacher at a school so in the case of Mildura South, where there is one classroom music teacher, if that person is a very motivated person and is really in tune with the practicality of instrumental teaching then he or she will get a program going and it will develop.

One of the things that primary schools always say is that they cannot find anyone to do it. There is just not that person out there who has the skill or the motivation to be able to get a program and then be able to source those instrumental teachers who are able to come in and teach two students here and two students over there, and hopefully they do not want a full-time job.

The speciality of music is about the motivation of that individual driving the program, more so than anything. In other subject areas you have a team: a team of English teachers, a team of maths teachers. They get together, they nut out the process and they support each other. The music teacher, the music program needs to have someone extremely good and motivated to drive it and everything will fall in with it.

The CHAIR — We have concluded our time in terms of questions. Is there anything that has not been covered already that anyone would like to make comment on?

Ms MacGREGOR — Further to that issue of what age we need to start in a primary school, in VCE violin the reality is that you are competing with a lot of private school kids in Melbourne and a lot of them are Asian and a lot of them are very dedicated through primary school. A lot of those kids achieve their music diploma through AMEB when they are in Year 9 and Year 10 at school.

Because of the way the scoring is moderated — I do not know quite all the terms of what they do, but they massage it and stretch it and put it through a shredder and reassemble it, and at the end of all of that you are ranked up against all of those other students. Now, there is a dominating of the high end in strings with children who started learning when they were very, very young, so the likelihood of you coming in as a string student, holding your instrument for the first time in Year 7 and then being able to achieve VCE and getting anything more than a high D or a low C is impossible. If we are going to have string players coming through to a VCE level — if that matters — then it has to be recognised that the training has to start somewhere halfway through primary school, otherwise you just cannot get there in time. If you started an instrument where the competition you were up against was not so high you could probably get a good mark. I do not know, is there an example of an instrument like that?

Ms McGANN — Oboe, bassoon.
Mr HENNIG — Bass guitar.

Ms MacGREGOR — Bassoon, yes. You will have three other people in Victoria who submit for the bassoon exam and they only got their bassoon in Year 10, because they cost $15 000 or something. So the competition is a much fairer playing field in a way. I am not saying that the string playing field is not fair; it is how it is, and it is wonderful that there are so many talented kids who have worked really hard from a really young age. But it is impossible to compete with it unless you start young. I have got one VCE string player at the moment, and last year I had one. No, I have got two at the moment and last year I had one. Last year was so difficult, incredibly difficult. It is like trying to do VCE maths when you have only done grade 3 maths at school.

Maybe that does not matter. Maybe music is about the teamwork and the responsibility and citizenship and confidence and public performing and building courage to get up, going to eisteddfod and standing up and kind of declaring your stuff. With all of this wonderful human development stuff that comes through music VCE does not matter. But if we want VCE we have to start them early.

Ms McGANN — Can I just add to that. I think the level of playing does matter because we have got lots of students in this district who have never heard a good performance, because they only hear their fellow students and because they do not start early enough, or they have not had the support, or their teachers quit, or funding for their instrument has gone away. They only hear to a certain standard, so they have a misguided idea of either how good they are or how bad they are compared with the whole musical world of Australia or even internationally.

Mr PUSZ — Can I chime in on a different subject. We talked about funding before. I just would like to say that although we talked about how prohibitive it is and that it can push people away and so forth, I feel I should also point out that it would be a mistake to therefore find some program and some way of making it free for everyone. If people do not value it then they do not put the effort in, and the effort is a huge part of it. I just thought I should say that.

The CHAIR — Good point. We are going to have to wrap up in a moment.

Mr HENNIG — Peter, because you are our local representative, I just bring it to your attention that we do have a pretty good instrumental program in our schools here, but currently every single person on that program is on permission to teach and is going to struggle to get on the payroll next year. So we are talking about our 250 kids, we are talking about most of the 70-odd performances in the district that we do for schools, that we enable them to do, and at the moment we are pulling our hair out. It is not just one or two individuals; it is the entire team, and it is compounded because it is a rural place. It is not just about our jobs, it is also about the fact that we are going to struggle to find people to come in and fill these roles that are suitable. There is a lot of knowledge in this team. We poached them from all over the state, and to think that it is not going to affect it — it is. It is going to affect it considerably.

The CHAIR — Excellent. Thank you very much for appearing before the committee today. You have certainly provided us with a whole lot of information that will be very useful in cobbling together our set of recommendations. We have all been converted, I think it would be fair to say, in terms of the importance of music. I can assure you that one of the great benefits of being involved in committees like this is that we get to hear about so many great programs that are on offer. We want to commend you for the work that you do and wish you well in advancing that.

Witnesses withdrew.