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The Australian College of Educators

Submission to:

**Inquiry into the Extent, Benefits and Potential of
Music Education in Victorian Schools**

**being conducted by the
Education and Training Committee
Parliament of Victoria.**

The Australian College of Educators (ACE) appreciates the invitation to make a submission to this inquiry. The College is well placed to assist the Inquiry in its deliberations. The College has a long history as a professional association and is the oldest association in the country that represents educators across the nation. ACE members are drawn from both the government and non-government sectors of schooling and across all levels of education from early childhood to tertiary. It is the professional voice for educators. As a self-funding body, the College is clearly focussed on providing the best outcomes in education for young people and operates free of agendas that do not relate to good education.

The College sees this inquiry as an opportunity to build broad consensus around a new set of arrangements for the development of young people in our care. The arrangements should be informed by a clear educational rationale that provides a solid basis for setting goals, parameters and priorities now and into the future.

Signed by:

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Overview

Schooling is largely the responsibility of State governments rather than the Commonwealth government, but there is no doubt that an increasingly national focus is guiding much education policy and provision, often through partnerships between governments and schooling sectors. With the advent of the Australian Curriculum there is an opportunity to develop Victorian policy and arrangements that complement national policy on curriculum, including Music curriculum.

The effectiveness of this Inquiry is contingent upon clear definition of terms and concepts based on current best practice; the identification of the issues faced and the adoption of appropriate principles and values that guide any outcomes. It is also important that any work completed complements developments on a national level and relates to initiatives and operations across Government, Catholic and Independent sectors. It is highly desirable that outcomes result in programs that are sustainable beyond electoral cycles and political whim.

The Inquiry's success will be judged in the education community by the extent to which it engages stakeholders, especially those knowledgeable in this area. The identification of key stakeholders is something with which ACE is happy to assist.

ACE takes the view that any consideration of music curriculum does not come at the expense of other art forms (dance, drama, media arts, visual arts). ACE is also committed to the principle that music education be designed and delivered by excellent practitioners highly skilled in principles of pedagogy and assessment as well as strong discipline knowledge. ACE would encourage the Inquiry to conduct a rigorous assessment of the quality of existing programs as there is some concern that programs that claim to be arts education initiatives may lack the discipline rigour or reference to appropriate music education scope and sequence. Just as we would not assume a 'writer in residence' would deliver a total English curriculum, so too should the case be with music education.

ACE encourages the Inquiry to refer to previous major reports on music education in Australia especially the landmark report of the National Review of School Music Education (NRSME) in 2006.

The remainder of this submission to the Inquiry is organised under the main terms of reference. Responses are deliberately broad and are meant to seed further investigations on the part of the Inquiry.

Evidence supporting music education in schools

This section addresses Terms of Reference 1-3 together.

- 1. Benefits to society and to individual students wanting to pursue music as a career**
- 2. General benefits to students as a result of music education**
- 3. Benefits to student academic performance as a result of music education**

Music is a highly developed art form deeply embedded in all cultures. Music is a powerful means of linking people to their history, traditions and heritage, evident, for example, in the singing of the national anthem, performance of traditional indigenous music, and of traditional music from those who come to Australia from many other nations, and in the participation in the myriad forms and styles of music, whether folk, classical, jazz, blues, pop, rock, dance and so on. Australian music, whether composed or performed by Australians, is a significant means of capturing and expressing an Australian cultural identity.

Music as an industry makes a major contribution to the Australian economy, providing income and employment for performers, composers, technicians, retailers, administrators, educators and many others.

Music education therefore contributes to the transmission and further evolution of the nation's history, culture and heritage as well as to the nation's economic well-being. For individuals, participation in music as listener, performer or creator supports personal wellbeing and links to community. Most importantly music education enriches people's lives by deepening their understanding and experience of music, enabling fuller and more meaningful participation throughout their lives.

Music is an established discipline of study and has been a fundamental discipline in education for centuries, indeed, since ancient times. It has a unique body of knowledge and skills, and unique ways of knowing and understanding the human condition.

Governments regularly espouse the value of arts and music education, such as the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEECDYA, 2008). Many of these ideas are captured in the rationale for music education given by *The Draft Australian Curriculum: Arts Foundation to Year 10* (ACARA 2012):

... In music, students engage with music from diverse cultures and places. Through this practice they construct and communicate ideas, meanings and values about their personal, social and cultural worlds. Like all art forms music has the capacity to engage, inspire and enrich all students, exciting the imagination and encouraging students to reach their creative and expressive potential.

Music enables students to listen with intent, which underpins all music activities. Students individually and collaboratively engage with the elements and concepts of

music, through composing, performing and responding to create, communicate and evaluate music ideas.

Students learn the language, skills, techniques and knowledge of music in increasing depth and complexity with ongoing and disciplined practice. Students work with the elements and materials of music to develop musicianship, critical thinking and aesthetic understanding.

.... Students' active participation in music fosters learning for life-long well-being, developing understanding of other times, places, cultures and contexts.

Numerous research studies confirm that students who study music in a systematic and structured manner show gains in personal, social, and intellectual development. Music assists development of critical and creative thinking, social skills, concentration and memory, team-work and self-confidence. Research undertaken by Vaughan et al. (2011) found strong evidence that primary school students who participated in structured arts programs demonstrated significant gains in literacy, numeracy, wellbeing and attendance outcomes compared to students who did not participate in such programs.

While such findings are encouraging, they should not and do not form the major rationale for quality music education in schools. Music is intrinsically valuable as a unique form of human expression and experience and deserves its place in the curriculum for its own sake.

Current provision of music education in Victoria

This section addresses Terms of Reference 4-7 together.

- 4. Music education provided through specific funding for music education**
- 5. Music education provided through non-specific funding, for example, general student resource package funding**
- 6. Music education provided through parent contribution**
- 7. The extent and quality of music education provision in Victorian schools**

Schools offer education in music in various forms: regular classroom lessons, instrumental and vocal tuition, group performances, rehearsals and musical productions.

It is clear to ACE Victoria that the provision of music education in Victorian schools varies considerably, varying by sector (government/Catholic/ independent), by level (primary/secondary), by location (urban/regional/rural/remote) and especially by socio-economic background of students. In some schools the quality and depth of music programs are first-rate, with strong sequential classroom music courses taught by skilled and qualified teachers, and opportunities for instrumental tuition and performance. In too many schools, however, there are no qualified specialist music teachers, the classroom music program is sporadic and superficial, and music is treated as a peripheral activity. The most critical issue that this Inquiry should be addressing is the inequitable access to high quality music education by young people in Victorian schools.

The issues differ between primary and secondary schools. While it cannot be said that all Victorian secondary schools offer high quality music classes and vocal and instrumental tuition, in general the critical deficiencies in music education lie more in primary schools. Most general primary teachers are ill-equipped to teach music beyond a superficial level as they have had little training themselves. While some schools overcome this by using a roaming specialist music teacher, the limitations of school size and budget means that many schools cannot employ even a part-time specialist. More seriously, it is difficult for some schools (such as rural and regional) to find such a specialist. Smaller schools (often rural or regional) often find it difficult to offer a high quality music program, or indeed any music program.

Often music is allocated very little time in the crowded weekly primary school program, and this is also occurring more frequently in lower secondary schools as they try to accommodate so many subjects and expectations. In some primary schools, music is offered as a self-contained unit of a term or semester, sometimes centred on a concert performance or using an artist-in-residence; this may be the only formal music education for students over a two-year period. This is compounded by the fact that for many years music has been treated as simply one

of the forms of the Arts (along with Visual Arts, Dance, Drama and Media Studies), rather than as a unique discipline.

The situation with extra-curricular music tuition (solo or group) varies even more. While some schools have outstanding comprehensive instrumental and vocal programs, often funded to a large extent by fees charged to parents of participating students, other schools offer no such programs.

Again, the disparity of provision and quality of both classroom and extra-curricular music is a matter of great concern, as it unnecessarily reinforces existing social and educational inequities.

Future optimum provision of music education in Victorian schools

This section addresses Terms of Reference 8-11 together.

8. Future optimum governance and oversight arrangements

9. Future optimum provision of music education in Victorian schools

10. Optimum balance of central mandates and supports

11. Optimum balance of music specific funding, non-music specific funding and parent contribution

Listening, composing and performing are at the core of any music education program. The College believes that all children and young people have a basic entitlement to a broad music education from pre-school until at least mid secondary years, including singing, basic music literacy, an opportunity to learn an instrument and an opportunity to participate in vocal and instrumental ensembles.

Curriculum and school programs

An effective music program at any level should be sequential and offered in all years of schooling. One-off programs (no matter how good and entertaining) are no substitute for this, nor, even, are artist-in-residence programs (despite the merits of many of these).

The Victorian Government, in seeking further reform of school education in Victoria in order to achieve excellence of outcomes, has set out in a position paper *Towards Victoria as a Learning Community* (DEECD 2012) its key objectives and directions for education reform. With respect to curriculum, the paper proposes that

[w]hole-school curricula that are scoped, sequenced and documented will be developed to support uncluttering of the curriculum – ensuring schools can devote attention to both essential learning and each student’s broader needs.

These whole-school curriculum materials will show how learning can be organised across the key stages and learning areas to ensure that all important skills and knowledge are covered.

Such guidance will be crucial in coming years as the Australian curriculum is implemented, but the College would be concerned if ‘essential learning’ is narrowly defined, leaving music once again to the vicissitudes of local curriculum programming, with the risk of tokenism, and lack of continuity and developmental sequence.

While the College would applaud the principles of professional trust and school autonomy outlined in *Towards Victoria as a Learning Community*, these need to be balanced by clear community expectations and standards. Schools need clear guidance about curriculum programming, resources, standards and assessment

processes. The level of guidance apparent in the draft Australian curriculum in the Arts is inadequate to assist schools design detailed music courses for all year levels. Supplementary advice and resources will be needed, including clear criteria for quality music programs and clear minimum requirements to support continuous, sequential and developmental music courses. This could well be provided by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority and sector authorities.

Teacher education and professional development

Ideally a musical specialist teacher should be in every primary and secondary school. While this is not achievable in the short term, there needs to be some progress towards this through planning of reforms to teacher training, professional learning and allocation of teachers to schools. Reforms should be the context of nationally agreed processes and programs, through working with key national bodies such as ACARA and AITSL.

- Undergraduate and post graduate teacher education courses should be reviewed with increased emphasis on music education.
- The Victorian government should work with education authorities and specialist music professionals to oversee the provision and quality of music education in Victorian schools, to develop strategies to improve these so that every student in a Victorian school, no matter what background or particular needs, has access to high quality music education.
- To increase the range of musical learning for students and teachers, the Victorian government, in partnership with the music education profession and non-government school sectors, should facilitate further opportunities for partnerships between schools, the community and the music industry.
- Research is needed into models of teaching through which students best learn music
- Professional learning and networking opportunities for teachers of music are crucial.

ACE Victoria would be pleased to engage in or even facilitate further in-depth discussions with relevant key groups active in music education in order to investigate fruitful strategies to improve the quality and provision of music education in Victorian schools.

Acknowledgements

This submission was prepared by Carl Stevens in consultation with

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