



# Victorian Student Representative Council

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## Victorian Student Representative Council Submission

regarding the

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

#### **Introduction to the VicSRC**

The Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) is a democratic network of SRCs working to represent the views of secondary students in Victoria. Student Representative Councils (SRCs – sometimes known by other names) are the bodies that exist within most secondary schools to represent the opinions of students. The VicSRC has over 70 member SRCs representing more than 40,000 secondary students. Our vision is to bring Student Representative Councils together across Victoria to make the voices of students heard at all levels and, through that process, enable students (and their organisations) to develop their vision and capacity for making a difference in their school and across the state.

The VicSRC is auspiced by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, the peak body and leading policy advocate on young people's issues in Victoria. The Youth Affairs Council provides a means through which the youth sector and young people voice their opinions and concerns in regards to policy issues affecting them. The Youth Affairs Council believes that strong student representative structures are essential for the continued achievement of improved student learning outcomes. These structures are the most effective way to engage with students where they are at and thus enhance teacher and school capacity to respond to changes in student learning needs.

#### **Benefits of Music Education**

The Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) is glad to be part of the discussion around *the extent, benefits and potential of music education in Victorian schools*. This timely inquiry provides an opportunity to investigate some of the existing challenges for music education in Victoria and also delve into the myriad of benefits of music education for young people.

The VicSRC believes that all young people should have access to quality music education and that any funding model should allow all Victorian schools to offer quality music education to their students. A music education that allows young people to actively participate in making music through a variety of ways stimulates creativity and imagination, and develops aural perception and coordination. Music also develops self-discipline and organisation through regular practice and rehearsals and an appreciation of the sustained effort it takes to improve your skills. Being part of an ensemble, be it a choir, orchestra, band or chamber group builds teamwork and responsibility for your team members. It is also well known that learning to read music and playing music develops higher thinking skills and improves brain development. As Richard Gill notes:

Music doesn't describe, narrate or tell stories. What it does best is evoke, suggest and imply. It can open up the mind of a child in extraordinary ways. The abstraction of music allows them into a special world and a unique way of thinking.<sup>1</sup>

## Hearing from Students

The VicSRC believes it is imperative that the Parliament of Victoria Education and Training Committee hear directly from students about the benefits of music education as they experience it.

It is important to engage students as active partners in their own education and learning, both individually and collectively. Such an approach clearly reflects the Government's vision for students within the Victorian education system. Students have a unique point of view about the education they receive and often have ideas to improve teaching and learning. Students who are involved (or have been involved) in the music program at their school should be consulted on the extent, benefits and potential of music education in Victorian schools. Not only do the results of this inquiry impact them directly, but also the Education and Training Committee will benefit from hearing what they have to say.

## Student Reflections

The VicSRC is pleased to include reflections from two students on the benefits and potential of the music education they've been a part of at their schools.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Gill 2011. *Richard Gill: The Value of Music Education*. TEDxSydney <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/bigideas/stories/2011/07/05/3260643.htm>

## **Reflection 1.**

*Student from Victorian Metropolitan Secondary School*

Having had no prior music experience upon entry to high school, music to me seemed distant and unobtainable except to those who begin piano at the age of five. Attending a school with such a strong focus upon the music program, I was soon instilled with confidence to participate and immerse myself in the culture of the school. Following my school's annual music expo evening- throughout which we were encouraged to sample each instrument, and select one based upon each one of the instrumental teaching staff's recommendation- I selected the cello, for the same reason I still explain now, it 'just felt right'.

For many years my school has supported a culture throughout the school, so that almost 50% of the student population actively participates in the music program. Accordingly, my involvement in the program has allowed me to develop a variety of friendships and form strong ties with a large compass of my fellow student body, in which way no other school program has been able to replicate. Friendships aside, the inherent team nature of music and ensembles exposes you to a wide variety of people that perhaps all the time you might not agree with, and for me, artistic differences of opinion were the first opportunities for workplace style dispute resolution. As a student currently in my first part time job, the skills learnt from such disputes have been invaluable as I experience a variety of people, each who have different views, or can be challenging at times to work with.

Similarly, classroom music is just as valuable for such skills development, and with an even wider variety of students who may or may not elect to do extracurricular music, classroom music ensembles and other group activities are prime examples of tasks where teamwork is inherent to the success of the task.

The ability to do music at school has also allowed me to discover one of my now greatest passions. As an area that I am seriously considering as a career, I still wonder how different I would be should my school have restricted my discovery of music. There are so many other students I know that also only started music in Year 7, and have proceeded to become professionals in their fields. Music as a subject, and through the way it is funded, legitimises it within schools as a viable and respectable pathway.

## Reflection 2

*Student from Victorian Metropolitan Secondary School*

My experience in music education is somewhat odd. Where most people start playing music because they have an interest, I started playing because I was put in a compulsory school music class. From the moment I stepped foot in that class my life was changed. Where previously I was disengaged from school and would on days refuse to go simply because of how bored I would get, I was now excited to go to school not just for my music class now, but for the many ensembles that I joined in the following weeks, as it became apparent in the class I had a knack for learning theory which I easily applied to many instruments. As I started attending school more and involving myself in the schools music program, I started becoming more confident in myself, and in turn made friends. It is also important to note that while music made me enjoy school and had improved my social abilities, it had also given me an outlet for when things aren't going great. When I'm sad and upset now I can guarantee that there will be a song I can sing to and feel like someone completely understands. It is strange to reflect back and see how much I have changed because of a simple year 8 music class, however I could not be more pleased with how I have evolved because of it.

Both statements above highlight the important formative role that music education has played and continues to play in the lives of these two young people.

It is important to recognise that the two reflections above do not represent the views of all Secondary School students in Victoria. The VicSRC strongly recommends that the Parliament of Victoria Education and Training Committee hear the views of a variety of students across Victoria on their own experiences with music education.

The VicSRC is happy to help facilitate further discussion with young people during this inquiry.

Yours sincerely,



Kate Walsh  
Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) Coordinator

On behalf of the VicSRC Student Executive.