

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

Submission from the Australian Education Union Victorian Branch

The Victorian Branch of the Australian Education Union (AEU) welcomes the opportunity to participate in this inquiry. With more than 48,000 members in Victorian public schools, the AEU is well positioned to comment on the state of music education as it currently stands in Victorian government schools. The AEU's My School Needs policy states that: 'Students do well in their studies when they have a curriculum which meets their individual needs, talents and interests. Schools need the resources to offer a broad range of subjects that engage all students and lead to productive post-school pathways'. Music plays an important role in a diverse curriculum.

The general conclusion drawn here is that access to quality music education in Victoria has been hampered by a lack of resources for schools. At the primary level, music education is often squeezed by an increasing focus on high-stakes literacy and numeracy testing within an already crowded curriculum. Access to music education in secondary schools is often restricted by resource constraints and a shortage of qualified teachers.

Evidence supporting music education in schools

- (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;*

That there are considerable social and individual benefits from quality music education is uncontroversial. The 2005 *National Review of Music Education* summarises a range of benefits suggested by research including those supporting a student's physical, mental and social development; flow-on benefits to other areas of learning; the promotion of social and cultural learning; and rewards gained from the intrinsic benefits of music appreciation and practice.¹ Other submissions to this inquiry and previous investigations have covered the benefits of music education and the AEU will not add substantially to those here.

Current provision of music education in Victoria

- (4) music education provided through specific funding for music education;

Funding specifically targeting music education in Victoria is ostensibly for the provision of musical instrument instruction at the secondary level and is allocated to schools by Regional Offices. The total quantum of that funding and the means by which it is allocated to schools is not generally known for all regions (the former Eastern

¹ Pascoe et al, 2005, *National Review of School Music Education*, pp.8-11, http://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/9459/1/music_review_reportFINAL.pdf, accessed 5/2/13,

Metropolitan Region was an exception with regards to the latter). However, in general these funds have been allocated on the basis of the size and nature of the instrumental music program offered at individual schools.

In the context of shrinking education budgets it is likely that funding is diminishing although a lack of publically available, budget line data makes this difficult to assess. The AEU recommends that information on the funding mechanisms and the level of funding should be publically available.

- (5) music education provided through non-specific funding, for example, general student resource package funding;

As mentioned above, music education in Victorian schools in the early and middle years is struggling to compete for space in an education program that is constantly expanding to incorporate greater social functions for schools. The increased importance attached to high-stakes literacy and numeracy testing in the My School era also means that schools have less time and resources to allocate to music education. This problem is particularly acute in primary schools as they receive no funding specifically targeting music education; the incentives to hire a specialist music teacher (where one is available) in this environment are not high.

There is also evidence that a reduced focus on music in the primary curriculum is spilling over into generalist pre-service education courses where less time is spent on the delivery of classroom music programs than in the past.²

In order for every child to access a quality music education extra funding is required to provide properly qualified staff. In 2012, Heinrich found that the three main reasons primary principals did not run specific music programs in regional areas were budget constraints, a lack of qualified staff and insufficient room in the timetable.³

- (6) music education provided through parent contribution;

As a component within the Arts Domain of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards, music education should be provided for no charge under the *Education and Training Reform Act* (2006) where it is part of the core curriculum. Many Secondary schools charge fees to support the hire of instrumental music instructors whilst at others the instructors charge students directly.

Fees for instrumental music instruction are a disincentive for lower income students to pursue music education into the higher years of schooling; any increase in the parent/student contribution towards funding would obviously further disadvantage these students. The enrolment reductions that fee increases are likely to produce will adversely affect the viability of instrumental music education itself.

² Stevens-Ballenger, et al, 2010, Preservice primary music: where to begin?, *Victorian Journal of Music Education*, No. 1, pp.36-41.

³ Heinrich, J. 2012, THE PROVISION OF CLASSROOM MUSIC PROGRAMS TO REGIONAL VICTORIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A MIXED METHODS STUDY, thesis submitted for Masters of Education, p. 114, <http://misslyonsmusicroom.edublogs.org/files/2012/12/Jennifer-Heinrich-2011-2d9efhv.pdf>, accessed 13/2/13

- (7) the extent and quality of music education provision in Victorian schools;

According to the AEU's *State of Our Schools 2012* survey, 20 per cent of school principals surveyed reported that they were unable to run a music program at their school due to a lack of qualified staff. This figure is similar to that obtained by the National Review of School Music Education in 2005. Similarly, seven per cent of principals reported in the 2012 survey that they used staff unqualified in the music curriculum to deliver music education programs. *The National Review of School Music Education* revealed that, nationally, 'opportunities for young people to engage and participate in music in schools have declined over the last two decades'.⁴ This decline was in part a result of the under-funding and curriculum crowding described above. The review also found a self-perceived reduction of the status of music teachers who reported a lack of status in schools due to 'their treatment by school hierarchies; working conditions; unacknowledged or under-acknowledged work; under-valued place in the curriculum as an "extra-curricular frill"; and, lack of recognition'.⁵

The scant evidence available does not seem to indicate a healthy environment for music education in Victoria. Up-to-date evidence on the current state of enrolments in music education and staff profiles, at least at the secondary level, should be made available either through the DEECD or the VCAA. A well-constructed sample of schools could be surveyed to gain a fuller picture of the extent and quality of music education provision in Victoria without adding to the administrative burden of all schools. The former Eastern Metropolitan Region's *Secondary School Music Survey 2012* could serve as a starting point for such research. Similar research is particularly necessary for primary schools where useful administrative data is unlikely to be available from government agencies.

Future optimum provision of music education in Victorian schools

- (8) optimum governance and oversight arrangements;

A concern around governance and oversight arrangements relates to the application of the Permission to Teach (PTT) issued by the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT). The PTT is issued to music instructors undertaking the role of a classroom teacher without full teacher qualifications.

As stated in a previous submission to a review of the PTT by the VIT, the AEU considers that the issuing of PTT for instructors undertaking teaching roles should be conditional on an annually substantiated lack of availability of a suitable, fully qualified teacher for that position. Without this condition there is very little incentive for instructors with PTT to become fully qualified. For those who have undertaken the extra work to become qualified teachers, there are fewer positions available.

The VIT's current permission to teach policy allows instrumental music programs to be defined as co-curricular or extra-curricular. This is an incorrect construction of instrumental music programs, which nevertheless determines the VIT's approach to the registration of instructors and is leading to some schools running programs offered by

⁴ Pascoe et al, p.106

⁵ Ibid, p. 108

staff without the correct registration status. More broadly, VIT's position is likely to have longer term impacts on the supply of qualified music teachers to the detriment of music programs in schools.

This situation is not in the best interest of students and is inconsistent with the whole rationale of teacher registration.

A shortage of teachers should not be addressed by compromising quality assurance procedures. The Government should address this shortage by making teacher qualifications for instructors easier to access. Public supplements for course fees are likely to encourage many instructors to gain a teaching qualification. There may also be some scope to investigate the use of Recognition of Prior Learning in expediting an instructor's progress through teacher education courses.

The Department's model for managing the employment of Instrumental Music Teachers (IMTs) and instructors also acts as a significant barrier to the provision of instrumental music programs in schools. It is common for teachers and instructors to work across multiple locations with their position at each location subject directly to the number of students they teach. When student enrolments fall at one of these locations, an additional budget burden is placed on the base school responsible for administering matters surrounding the IMTs employment, including those in relation to the Department's *Management of Excess Teaching Service* requirements.

As instrumental music courses are often vulnerable to enrolment variation, the Government should consider other models of employment of IMTs.

The Western Australian model involves IMTs being employed centrally at the School of Instrumental Music within the Department of Education. The school collaborates with districts, clusters and individual schools in providing,

- Consultancy (in planning and developing school music programs)
- Instrumental staffing allocation and management (including performance management and professional development for instrumental music teachers)
- Instrumental instruction and ensemble direction
- An instrument loan, maintenance and repair service
- Access to an Instrumental Music Resource Centre
- Enrichment activities for students⁶

The school allows for continuity of programs within clusters so that students learning an instrument in primary school are able to access teachers of that instrument in secondary school. The School of Instrumental Music also provides advice on classroom music programs and is an advocate for musical education and participation.

Pending any consideration of improved staffing arrangements to enhance the provision of music education in public schools, for instrumental music programs at the secondary level, the allocation of resources should remain with the Regional Office rather than via a universal formula applying to all schools. This allows knowledge of local conditions and programs to more effectively inform funding decisions. The allocation model

⁶ School of Instrumental Music website, <http://www.sim.iinet.net.au/delivery.html>, accessed 22/2/13.

employed by the former Eastern Region - which is partly formula-based but also allows variation to suit specific, local needs - is a useful example of how flexibility and transparency can coexist in the distribution of resources.

- (9) optimum use of targeted funding;
- (10) optimum balance of central mandates and supports;
- (11) optimum balance of music specific funding, non-music specific funding and parent contribution.

The optimum balance of targeted funding, music specific funding and central mandates and supports is one that allows individual schools to meet the specific needs of their students in accordance with the skills of their staff, whilst remaining accountable to community expectations and legal requirements. In Victoria's devolved system of public education, targeted funds and music-specific funding are crucial in maintaining viable music education programs.

Schools need adequate resources and timetable space to deliver a quality music education. However, any change in the balance of funding towards user-pays will seriously diminish accessibility to music programs - particularly instrumental music programs - for many Victorians.