

# QUALITY INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION REVIEW:

## Submission in Response to the Discussion Paper

### July 2021

Alberts | The Tony Foundation Submission

#### INTRODUCTION

[Music Education: Right from the Start](#) is a collaborative project, led by Alberts | The Tony Foundation. The project is driven by the conviction that all Australian primary school children need, and have the right to, a quality sequential and ongoing music education. The project has been informed and developed through extensive stakeholder consultation. It is steered by an Advisory Group of individuals and organisations representing music education providers, education, research, philanthropy and the music industry.

Music education is recognised in the Australian Curriculum and elaborated in the curricula of the respective state and territory jurisdictions. While this might presume that all primary children will be receiving music education, it is recognised that a large proportion of these students have little or no access to music education (Collins et al, 2020). Indeed, Kodaly Australia notes that the most recent available data suggests up to two-thirds of Australian children do not receive a primary school music education (Petrova, 2012).

Clearly, curricula recognition is not sufficient.

There are multiple barriers to the provision of quality music education. These were articulated in the [Music Education: A Sound Investment](#) report (October 2020) and debated in a series of consultations held over the last twelve months in developing the **Music Education: Right from the Start** initiative.

Those consultations consistently rated issues regarding the teaching workforce as a matter warranting priority attention: most immediately the initial teacher education and professional learning support for generalist primary classroom teachers as well as the initial teacher education of specialist music teachers. This might be characterised as the ‘skills cliff’ evident in the current teaching workforce including the pipeline of qualifying teachers.

## THE SITUATION AS IT STANDS

In 2019 The Tony Foundation commissioned the internationally recognised expert Dr Anita Collins and her colleagues, Dr Rachael Dwyer and Aden Date, to provide a stocktake on music education in Australia: to understand the state-of-play, to gather evidence and to identify barriers in the current system which prevents it from achieving the desired outcomes for primary school students.

Their research was published in the abovementioned report [Music Education: A Sound Investment](#) (October 2020).

The broad canvas of the current situation with respect to ITE is articulated in that report as follows:

*Universities continue to have responsibility for pre-service music teacher training around Australia. There is no formal designation for what constitutes a primary music specialist outside of Queensland so a classroom music teacher can have any one of several pre-service experiences. Most university education departments are supplementing their traditional four-year, self-contained teaching degrees with a two-year Masters of Teaching (MTeach) program which requires a bachelor's degree in any discipline. Under the influence of state-based teacher registration boards and the national Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, the amount of music education training that can be delivered during the MTeach is very low. One interviewee said that the MTeach provides "just enough music education training to put the fear into [the pre-service teachers]".*

It is noted that under the current system, the closest approximation to a primary music specialist would be a student who undertakes a Bachelor of Music (BMus) and several Arts education units as part of their MTeach.

The research points to several ways in which to enhance the student's ability to become a competent primary music teacher including:

- Bachelor of Music degrees which more directly focus on the teaching of music;
- Closer collaboration between conservatoria and education departments to improve pathways for BMus students to matriculate into MTeach programs;
- Greater cooperation between universities and those professional development associations which are providing in-service training for the teaching of music.

It is particularly sobering to read the report's note that:

*Numerous interviewees argued that the pre-service teacher training experience was one of the biggest faults in the music education system in Australia. Very few well-trained primary music teaching graduates are being produced, and several interviewees independently speculated that there may be a significant skills shortage in approximately 10 years. <sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Collins, pp. 34-35

Two years on, the speculation on a 10-year horizon is already appearing to be overly conservative.

The value of the specialist music teacher is well recognised. Indeed, the strength of music education in Queensland was built on the training and employment of specialist music teachers. This has not been the tradition in other jurisdictions.

There is no escaping the workforce pressures outlined in the Panel's discussion paper and the expectation of cultural and historic variations between jurisdictions. In such an environment increased attention must also be given to lifting the competence and the confidence of the generalist primary classroom teacher in delivering quality music learning.

## WHY IT MATTERS

The provision of quality, sequential and ongoing music education for all Australian primary school children embodies a richer understanding of what constitutes a quality education. Moreover, it supports and enhances those areas of learning that occupy so much attention in education reforms.

The research provides substantial evidence for the benefits including that a quality music education:

- Increases attention stamina and focus
- Improves social skills and personal wellbeing
- Heightens empathy and valuing of diversity
- Reduces stress and anxiety
- Improves learning capacity
- Supports reading and numeracy skills
- Improves self-regulation
- Improves cognitive connectivity and efficiency
- Hones neural synchronisation to enhance learning
- Supports immune health
- Boosts academic performance in English, Maths and Science

A summary of the current research (plus extensive references) can be found in the *Music Education: A Sound Investment* report.<sup>2</sup>

We note in the Review's discussion paper that:

*Under the Accreditation Standards, that ITE program development and design is required to take account of contemporary and emerging developments in education. However, what this means is not expanded upon. Nor do the Accreditation Standards reference long-standing evidence about learning from cognitive science and elsewhere. (p. 18)*

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. pp.14-19

While the social sciences have long shown the personal, emotional and social benefits of music, we would draw the Panel's particular attention to the substantial – and growing – body of research on music learning in the fields of neuroscience and psychology.

As Dr Collins writes:

*With the advent of new technologies (fMRI, EEG, PET) the impacts of music education were re-examined and many of the findings prior to the 1990s were both validated and expanded<sup>3</sup>. As we approach 30 years since the commencement of neuroscientific research into the impact of music education, there is a substantial and compelling research base to view music education as a tool to support cognitive and learning development for every child<sup>4</sup>*

Most in our community recognise the importance of music in our own lives and most parents appreciate the value of music for their children. Educators – and those working with children – see the power of music to engage young learners, strengthen an attachment to education and socialise positive behaviours. Music education has additional practical benefits including the development of spatial and temporal awareness which in turn aids the development of logic processing. All of this is well supported by the research. The strength of these benefits would in themselves be enough to make the case for quality music learning to hold central place in every primary school.

The case is all the more compelling given the cognitive benefits (learning development). Music learning is a tool to train the auditory processing system to function effectively. Music learning supports the developmental process from verbal language to reading, writing and understanding language. Music learning is a tool to train the logic and sensory structures and functions of the brain to develop in a highly effective way, evident in the strong correlations between academic attainment and music learning.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION

### **1. Provide accreditation pathways for specialist primary teachers**

Ensure that AITSL's program accreditation standards provide opportunities for programs that allow for the preparation of well-trained primary specialist teachers, demonstrating an understanding that these teachers require different knowledge and skills to generalist classroom teachers. In particular, the mandatory content listed in Schedule 1 for Program Standard 4.2 should be reconsidered for ITE programs for primary specialist teachers.

### **2. Ensure that all learning areas are given sufficient curriculum time in ITE programs**

Because of the current shortage of music specialist teachers and primary specialist ITE programs, it is imperative that primary classroom teachers are confident in delivering music education. An understanding of the place and purpose of music education, together with the research that underpins it, is a critical element in the initial training (and subsequent professional learning) for every primary school teacher.

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<sup>3</sup> Reimer, B. (2009). *Seeking the significance of music education: Essays and reflections*. R&L Education.

<sup>4</sup> Hallam, S. (2015). *The Power of Music: a research synthesis of the impact of actively making music on the intellectual, social and personal development of children and young people*. London, Ed.

## GAPS IN OUR KNOWLEDGE

As noted above the most recent data on access to music education by primary school children is a 2012 unpublished study.

The absence of reliable data applies equally to the teaching workforce. We do not know, for example:

- How many pre-service classroom teachers are receiving a meaningful foundation in music learning;
- The capacity of ITE institutions to meet these requirements even when music learning is recognised as a core educational element;
- How many specialist music teachers are active in schools in each of the jurisdictions/systems;<sup>5</sup>
- How many (and consequently what proportion of) primary school students are receiving tuition from a specialist music teacher.

In a time when the importance of evidence in policy development and related operational decisions is said to be paramount, the paucity of baseline data on access to and the provision of quality music education is remarkable. It is in itself a barrier to delivering on the promise of a quality music education for all.

## IN CONCLUSION

Every Australian parent has been told that their children will receive a music education. For all the goodwill, there is simply no way that commitment can be honoured if our teachers are inadequately trained and consequently lack the knowledge, skills and confidence to offer their students music learning that is of a quality that delivers the known personal, social and educational benefits.

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<sup>5</sup> The NSW Education Minister, in reply to a question on notice, indicated as of 20 December 2020 that the total number of 'music teachers' was 584 representing 568.8 FTE positions. We have not been able to confirm these numbers.

## A NOTE ON ALBERTS | THE TONY FOUNDATION

Alberts is a 137-year-old family business that has played a vital role in the evolution of Australia's media and popular culture since the early days of sheet music and music publishing through to the birth of commercial radio and television and the founding of the Australian pop and rock music industry. Founded in 1885 by Jacques Albert, the company is now run by members of the fifth generation under the guidance of fourth generation member Robert Albert. Alberts was a co-founder of the Australasian Performing Right Association (APRA) in 1926, introduced to protect the rights of writers, composers and publishers. The company is known for its long association with local musicians including AC/DC, The Easybeats, Stevie Wright, Harry Vanda and George Young; and more recent support of Megan Washington, Wally DeBacker and Josh Pyke. Alberts has always believed in the power of music to change lives. In 2012 members of the fifth generation established The Tony Foundation, which strives to improve the lives of young Australians through music.

## REFERENCES

Collins, A , Dwyer, R and Date,A (2020) *Music Education: A Sound Investment*, Alberts | The Tony Foundation, Sydney.

Petrova, I. (2012). *What makes good music programs in schools? A study of school music across Australia and a comparison with England and Russia* [Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of New South Wales]. Sydney, Australia.