

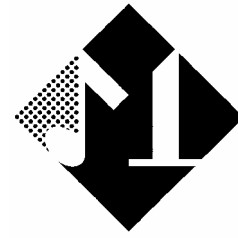
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*Australia's representative to the International Music Council*



**Music Council of Australia**

Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP, Chair  
Inquiry into Teacher Education  
Standing Committee on Education and Vocational  
Training  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
April 15 2005

By email

Dear Mr Hartsuyker

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission into the Inquiry into Teacher Education.

The Music Council of Australia is a national peak organisation for the music sector. Its membership of 50 includes nominees of national music organisations and distinguished individual members elected to positions each assigned to some aspect of music activity. The scope of the Council therefore extends across the music sector.

Although there are among Music Council members specialists in education, including teacher education, this brief submission is not intended to offer expert opinion on teacher training curricula but rather on a particular and disastrous deficiency of the current situation.

Music education in primary schools is delivered either by music specialists or classroom teachers, depending upon the school system or even upon the decision of individual schools. In most state systems, music is taught by the classroom teacher. There may also be other provision, e.g. of performing ensembles or of instrumental lessons, but frequently these require payments by parents and therefore are privileges that are accessible mainly to higher income families. The universal provision comes via the classroom teacher.

There are various levels of music 'readiness', as there are for other skills, and it is important that the transmission of musical skills begins at a very young age – preferably in the family and in pre-school, certainly so far as the public trust is concerned, from early in the primary school years.

Further, a true musical education depends upon the sequential accumulation of skills over an extended period of time. This may well be more important in music than in most other disciplines, especially for executant skills.

There are arguments favouring the delivery of the primary school music education by classroom generalists. This facilitates the integration of music into broader learning and of course, there is much research showing the effectiveness of the use of music as a vehicle for enhancing and accelerating learning in other disciplines.

That said, an effective music education requires a knowledgeable and competent teacher, as does an education in any other subject area.

Unfortunately, while the music education provided to teacher trainees varies greatly from institution to institution, the average is approximately 23 hours of instruction over the entire period of pre-service training. (Assoc. Prof. Robin Stevens: *Trends in the Provision of Music Education in Schools*. This study was commissioned by the Music Council and is available on its website, [www.mca.org.au](http://www.mca.org.au))

If you send your child for piano instruction and he or she perseveres for only 23 hours of lessons, you would have to conclude that there was an unusual lack of interest or persistence, and you would not expect that there had been an acquisition of any but the most rudimentary knowledge by the end of the period. A symphony orchestra violinist probably began lessons at the age of 5 and practised daily for the next 20 years in order to acquire sufficient skills to secure a position.

While of course we do not suggest for a minute that every child's music education should be planned on the basis that they may become a symphony musician, this puts into some context the adequacy of the average 23 hours instruction afforded to teacher trainees.

Research has shown that even with contact hours say triple this level (as were available before music was absorbed into the arts cluster), this training often sapped the confidence of teachers to deliver any meaningful music education. Many actively attempt to evade it altogether or ineffectually go through the motions of meeting the formal expectations of their school system.

The consequence is bound to be that insofar as they are dependent on the school for a music education, many students emerge without one. Some of them later choose to become primary school teachers and the cycle continues.

The current National Review of School Music Education presumably will comprehensively make the arguments for and against the value to children of a music education. The Music Council obviously can be expected to support any general positive thrust of these arguments and we do not attempt here to make the case since it would be bound to be less thorough.

Suffice to say that if such a case is accepted, the current situation with the training of primary school classroom generalists is entirely unsatisfactory. Considered in its totality and setting aside the merits of the programs in particular institutions, it is a pretence. An education that not only fails to educate to an adequate level but detracts from the confidence of its students to carry out the task for which it is supposedly intended to prepare them, has no credibility.

If the responsibility for primary school music education is to continue to be assigned to the classroom teacher, then it is the responsibility of the teacher training institutions to prepare them to execute their responsibilities competently and confidently.

There is another argument that primary school music education should be placed in the hands of specialists. The issue of adequately training primary school generalist in music would then be to some extent pre-empted. We accept that this Inquiry must deal with circumstances as it finds them and the decision as to the provision of resources to supply music specialists to primary schools lies in other hands. For the present, the music education of primary school generalists is in the Music Council's view the issue most urgently requiring a solution.

There are many other issues around the adequate training of specialist music teachers at both primary and secondary levels. On this occasion, the Music Council leaves the exposition of those matters to other specialist organisations.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to make this submission. We would be please to provide extra information or explanation upon your request.

Yours sincerely

Dr Richard Letts AM  
Executive Director