

Submission to the National Cultural Policy Review May 2026

Music Education: Right from
the Start, a collaborative
national initiative

Executive Summary

Arts and culture are the threads that connect us – to each other, to our communities, and to the stories that shape who we are. They enrich our lives not only through moments of beauty and expression, but through their capacity to foster belonging, curiosity, and shared understanding across generations and cultures. From early childhood onwards, engagement with the arts supports wellbeing – strengthening mental health, building confidence, and offering powerful ways to process experience and emotion.

They are also essential to children’s learning and development, supporting cognitive growth, language, creativity, and social skills. To realise these benefits fully, culture and the creative arts must be embedded across our education systems – through school and tertiary pathways – ensuring every young person has the opportunity to participate, create, and thrive.

Across diverse cultural backgrounds, the creative arts provide a space where identity is affirmed and difference is celebrated. They bring people together in ways few other domains can – bridging divides, sparking dialogue, and nurturing understanding and empathy. At their best, arts and culture are not a luxury, but a vital public good: contributing to social cohesion, lifelong learning, and a more inclusive, resilient society.

However, quality creative arts and music education were largely absent from Revive in 2022, with limited investment allocated to in-school arts initiatives. National Advocates for Arts Education (NAAE) reported that the Revive National Cultural Policy allocated \$2.6 million to in-school creative arts initiatives over five years, compared with \$75.6 million for STEM education.

This contrasts with the vision of Revive, which is for every Australian to have equitable access to arts and culture. There is a unique opportunity during primary school years to ensure every child has equity of access

to arts and culture as a foundation. This is enshrined within the Australian Curriculum, which recognises every child’s right to learn and make music at school (as one of the five creative arts).

However, in practice, access to arts education often depends on postcode or family income.

Therefore, [Music Education: Right from the Start](#) and its collaborators advocate for the creation of a new Creative Arts Education pillar in the next iteration of the National Cultural Policy.

A dedicated Creative Arts Education pillar is essential to translate the recognised benefits of arts and culture into sustained, equitable outcomes for all Australians. While the current cultural policy acknowledges the importance of creativity, it does not yet provide a coherent, whole-of-system framework to ensure consistent access, quality provision, and long-term investment in arts education. A distinct pillar would align cultural and education policy settings, embed creative learning from early childhood through to tertiary pathways, and support a skilled workforce of educators and teaching artists. It would enable national leadership, clearer accountability, and stronger partnerships across governments, sectors, and communities – ensuring that every child, regardless of their background or level of privilege, can experience the lifelong benefits of a rich, continuous creative education.

We call on the Commonwealth Government to provide equivalent funding for a 10-year creative arts education strategy, as was provided under the National STEM School Education Strategy, with an equivalent leadership framework of federal, state and territory education and arts ministers. This is critical to reversing more than two decades of systemic neglect, driven by the prioritisation of literacy and numeracy, and to establishing a strong foundation for equitable participation in Australia’s cultural life.

Introduction

The National Cultural Policy is an opportunity to lay a foundation and vision to ensure arts, music and culture flourish in Australia, enabling a creative and inclusive Australia, and ensuring all Australians can participate in and benefit from a rich cultural life.

This paper reflects the position of Music Education: Right from the Start, a collaborative national initiative, led by Alberts | The Tony Foundation. The initiative advocates for the role of music education as foundational to achieving this vision.

With a mission to ensure that every Australian child receives an ongoing, sequential, quality music education and its benefits, the Music Education: Right from the Start initiative focuses on strengthening the place and purpose of music within a well-rounded education, and on how to ensure equity of access for all primary school children.

Quality music education lays the foundations for thoughtful, well-rounded and engaged humans; a vibrant music sector and cultural industry; and ultimately a flourishing Australian society.

Why Music Education?

Music education is one of the most powerful tools we have to enhance learning, wellbeing, and creativity in Australian schools.

While not a magic wand, the evidence shows that quality music education has a role to play in amplifying and accelerating current educational priorities – boosting literacy and numeracy, enriching cognitive development, improving student engagement and attendance, and demonstrating the governments' commitment to equity of opportunity.

When children learn music, they learn more than notes and rhythm – they learn how to listen, collaborate, persist, and express themselves. These are skills that enrich learning across the curriculum and strengthen young people's capacity to thrive in school and in life.

To quote Dr Anita Collins, music education researcher and expert,

“Music education acts as both enhancement and intervention. It supports all students, regardless of their starting point, and contributes meaningfully to their development across literacy, numeracy, overall cognitive function and core learning behaviours.”

It would be a strategic and logical step to make music education the next national educational priority, as it will act as a strategic multiplier for the national focus on literacy, numeracy and positive learning behaviours.

Context and Challenges

Policy Context

The National Cultural Policy¹ states that:

- All Australians, regardless of language, literacy, geography, age or education, have the opportunity to access and participate in arts and culture.
- Australian students have the opportunity to receive an education that includes culture, creativity, humanities and the arts.

The National Cultural Policy values equity of access and opportunity in all forms of the arts and expression, including music.

Equity of opportunity must start early – ideally in early childhood education, and at a minimum in primary school (Years F–6), where every child has the right to creative arts and music education under the Australian Curriculum.

However, the presence of music in the curriculum alone is not enough to ensure that every child receives a quality music education.

For children to experience the full evidence-based benefits of music education, it must be **quality, sequential and ongoing**, and delivered consistently throughout the school year.²

Unfortunately, many children – often those who would benefit most – miss out on the cognitive, learning and wellbeing benefits of quality music education.

Systemic De-Prioritisation of Creative Arts Education

The increased policy focus on literacy and numeracy in national education priorities, including the Better and Fairer Schools

Policy and funding agreements (2025–2034), has contributed to the de-prioritisation of other subjects that support a well-rounded education and whole-of-child development.

The NSW Parliament's 2024 Joint Select Committee Inquiry on Arts and Music Education and Training in New South Wales found:

Every child in New South Wales deserves the benefits of a high-quality, richly complex creative arts education. However, due to socio-cultural factors including a focus on STEM subjects and standardised testing such as NAPLAN, arts and music education is often undervalued, leading to systemic neglect in investment.³

The report also identified economic, geographic, cultural, and social barriers preventing equal access to quality arts education, and significant disparities in delivery across school systems.

This pattern is repeated across the country.

In 2025, Australia's peak arts education advocates⁴ reported that:

- Arts education in primary schools is declining, with reduced curriculum time and fewer specialist programs.
- Enrolments in senior secondary Arts subjects are falling.
- Post-school creative pathways are shrinking as university and vocational courses close.
- Teacher training in the Arts has decreased, leaving many generalist teachers under-prepared.

¹ [National Cultural Policy—Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place 2022](#)

² [An Understanding of Quality School Music Education](#)

³ [JSC Inquiry into Arts and Music Education and Training in New South Wales 2024](#)

⁴ National Advocates for Arts Education NAAE – [Federal Election Statement, 3 May 2025](#)

- Students are increasingly denied access to the wellbeing, creativity and collaboration benefits of Arts learning.
- Public support remains high: three-quarters of Australians believe the Arts should be core to education.

Together, these trends indicate that systemic resourcing and training for arts education has not kept pace with curriculum and societal expectations.

Shortage of Confident Music Teachers

A “skills cliff” in music education has developed over many years and has reached a crisis point, particularly in government primary schools where 69% of Australian children are educated.

Recent research in NSW found that over 73% of teachers are not confident delivering music education independently in the classroom, despite 90% recognising its cognitive and social benefits.⁵

Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs include study across all curriculum areas, but music education hours have more than halved over the past 13 years, with an average of only 8–9 hours across a four-year degree.⁶

There are also limited pathways for training as a primary music specialist teacher and limited opportunities for permanent employment in government primary schools.

Queensland remains the exception, where the Department of Education employs specialist music and instrumental teachers who rotate across multiple schools. In comparison, specialist music teachers are not recognised in most other state systems and are often employed through temporary arrangements to cover non-teaching or non-contact time.



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Music Education Supports Australia’s Music Industry

Australia’s music industry plays a mutually beneficial role in supporting music education in primary schools.

Professional musicians contribute as instrumental teachers, ensemble leaders, musicians-in-residence, and creative partners through programs delivered by organisations such as:

- Australian Children’s Music Foundation
- Musica Viva Australia
- The Song Room.

These programs bring specialist skills and real-world musical practice into schools while also providing diversified income streams for artists in an industry characterised by portfolio careers and intermittent work.

Music education in primary schools is also fundamental to audience development for Australian music. Early experiences of making and listening to music shape lifelong engagement and increase the likelihood that young people will value and support live and recorded music as adults.

By strengthening these partnerships and ensuring music is valued and resourced in every primary school, Australia invests both in children’s learning and in the future of its music culture and industry.

⁵ [Setting the Tempo – ACER Primary Teachers’ Survey NSW, 2025](#)

⁶ [Fading Notes – Music Education for the Next Generation of Primary Teachers](#)

Our Position: Music Education is a National Opportunity

In 2026, we have a unique opportunity to re-prioritise music education, alongside the broader creative arts, within both national cultural and education policy.

Backing Teachers is the Key to Success

Delivering consistent, high-quality music education across all primary schools requires a diverse, well-supported teaching workforce that reflects the varied contexts of Australia's education systems. This includes generalist teachers, specialist music educators and teaching artists – each bringing different strengths, and all qualified through multiple, flexible pathways. Recognising and investing in this diversity is essential, particularly given the differences between metropolitan, regional, and remote settings, where access to specialist teachers may vary.

Australia already has a talented and committed teaching workforce. With the right professional learning, mentoring, and support, generalist primary teachers can become confident and competent classroom music educators. Empowering teachers to teach music well and employing and supporting primary music specialist teachers are the most effective and equitable way to ensure every child experiences quality music education every week.

Alongside this, there is an opportunity to support musicians to build teaching skills as a complementary pathway into music education. Many professional, contemporary, and community musicians bring strong practical expertise that can enrich classroom learning, especially where deeper musical knowledge is needed. With the right training and support, they can work alongside teachers to strengthen programs and help fill gaps, particularly where specialist educators are limited.

This multi-faceted approach would not only strengthen workforce capacity but also build a sustainable and adaptable system.

Through coordinated investment, mentoring, and professional development, Australia can build a sustainable foundation for quality music education, with long-term educational, social, and cultural benefits.

Capitalising on State-Level Momentum

State governments have become increasingly active in music education since Alberts' and The Tony Foundation committed to the first stage of the initiative in 2020.

Queensland remains the national benchmark, with government-employed specialist and instrumental music teachers delivering a minimum of 30 minutes of music education per week across the school year.

NSW and Victoria are currently working to strengthen their systems for supporting teachers and students to deliver quality music education. NSW is developing a 10-Year Music Education Plan, while South Australia is six years into its 10-Year Music Education Strategy.

There is a clear opportunity for national leadership through coordinated investment and collaboration to amplify state-based momentum and realise the broader benefits of music education within a whole-child framework.

Responding to the Live Music Inquiry

The 2025 House of Representatives Live Music Inquiry recognised primary school music education as the starting point for a vibrant national music culture.

The Committee noted that music education is essential not only for student development but also as the foundation of Australia's creative industries.

Evidence to the inquiry stated:

“Australia needs to develop greater musical curiosity, starting with school education and strategies to expose kids to live music.”

A strong foundation in primary school builds lifelong relationships with music – as creators, performers, producers, technicians, and audiences – supporting a vibrant Australian music industry and creative economy.

Equipping Children for an AI-Driven Future

The Australian Curriculum recognises that music learning contributes to cognitive, emotional, social, and personal development.

As Artificial Intelligence (AI) increasingly augments routine cognitive work, the human skills central to music – empathy, collaboration, creativity and emotional expression – become even more valuable.

Group music-making strengthens self-management, executive function and social competence, equipping students with capabilities essential for navigating complex future work and life environments.



Music Education: Benefits in Numbers

Children's Learning and Wellbeing



Music remains Australia's most popular art form for children with **47% of children are currently learning music in a school setting, 23% learning music outside of school**, through a range of providers, making it the most common extracurricular art form.⁷



Most primary teachers (**90%**) recognise music education's significant cognitive, social and emotional benefits, highlighting its indispensable role in holistic development and even more (**96%**) observed reductions in stress and anxiety among students engaged in music education.⁸

Developing Audiences



Music education's cultural value extends beyond economic measures with Australians who received arts education as **children are 56% more likely to attend live music events as adults, compared to 36% for those who did not**, directly sustaining the broader live music economy.⁹



One in five young Australians aged 16 - 25 (21%) strongly agree that attending music events is important to them. However, cost and safety concerns remain a barrier to participation in live events, more so for young women than young men.¹⁰

Supporting Music Artists



Teaching is one of the main ways that music artists in Australia supplement their income, with 24% saying it was their largest source of income.¹¹



Only 4% of music artists reported earning more than \$6,000 from recording and streaming income, while a third earned more than this amount from teaching.

Economic Contribution



Instruction and delivery are the engine room of the sector, with an estimated **\$1.8 billion in revenue and \$1.5 billion in GVA**. Instruction and delivery to students is by far the dominant subsector, accounting for most of the sector's economic contribution. It also encompasses over half of all identified music education organisations nationally.



Despite being primarily domestic in focus, the sector earns **\$90 million in export revenue, with research, pedagogy and teacher training generating \$13 million internationally**, highlighting that Australian expertise in music education has real global reach.¹²

⁷ [Music Australia: More than notes on the page May 2026](#)

⁸ [Setting the Tempo: Insights on ACER's Primary Teachers' Survey NSW May 2025](#)

⁹ [Music Australia: More than notes on the page May 2026](#)

¹⁰ [The Push Young Australian Music Audiences 2025](#)

¹¹ [MEAA Musicians 2024-25 Survey Report](#)

¹² [Music Australia: More than notes on the page May 2026](#)

Our Recommendations

Creative Arts Education: Securing Australia's Cultural Future

The long-term strength of Australia's cultural life depends on a foundation that is often overlooked: equitable access to high-quality creative arts education for all children.

Creative arts education - including music, visual arts, drama, dance and media arts - is where lifelong engagement with culture begins. It supports:

- the development of creative skills, expression, and confidence in young people
- a diverse and capable creative workforce across many disciplines
- engaged audiences and communities who value and participate in the arts

Despite its recognised place within the Australian Curriculum, access to quality arts education in primary school remains uneven.

Too often, opportunities depend on a child's postcode or family income. Without action, this inequity risks narrowing participation, limiting diversity of voices, and weakening Australia's cultural vitality.

Ensuring equitable access to creative arts education must be a priority within the National Cultural Policy.



Recommendation 1 Strengthen the Role of Creative Arts Education in the National Cultural Policy

Preferred approach: Establish a Creative Arts Education Pillar

A dedicated Creative Arts Education Pillar is needed to address fragmentation and underinvestment in arts education. Currently, responsibility sits across multiple policy areas, resulting in inconsistent delivery and limited accountability.

A clearly defined education pillar would align cultural and education policy, embedding creative learning from early childhood through to tertiary pathways, while recognising First Nations culture and contemporary Australian practice. It would provide a clear structure for coordinated action, sustained investment, and equitable access.

A national working group of Commonwealth and state governments and education and cultural portfolios should be established to drive implementation and share best practice.

Alternative approach: Elevate Creative Arts Education Across All Policy Pillars

As an alternative, creative arts education should be elevated and embedded across all pillars of the National Cultural Policy and positioned as foundational to achieving its objectives.

Creative learning underpins the development of artists, audiences, and the broader creative workforce, and contributes directly to access, participation, cultural identity, and industry sustainability. Embedding it across all pillars would ensure it is treated as a core enabler of a thriving cultural ecosystem.

This approach should include clear accountability measures and coordinated leadership to ensure meaningful implementation.

Provided below are some suggestions of where these recommendations could sit within existing pillars.

Pillar 1: First Nations First recognising that our first nations were the first teachers and educators on this land.

Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience as a quality music education for children engages them with music now and in the future.



Recommendation 2

Establish a National Standard for Quality Music Education

A national standard is required to ensure consistent, high-quality music education across all government primary schools.

At a minimum, the standard should provide a framework to support quality, sequential and ongoing music education, every week in the school year. It should guide quality and outcomes—not compliance—ensuring all students benefit from music’s cognitive, educational, and wellbeing impacts.

A clear national quality framework will support more consistent delivery, stronger accountability, and more effective investment.

Music Education: Right from the Start has produced a paper titled "An Understanding of Quality Music Education" as an example of such a standard.

Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story to ensure every child is equipped to participate in music culture now and for the rest of their lives.



Recommendation 3

Invest in the Music Education Workforce

Workforce capability is critical to delivering music education at scale. Generalist teachers deliver most primary music education but often lack confidence and competence. A nationally coordinated professional learning and mentoring program is needed to build system-wide capability.

At the same time, stronger pathways for specialist music educators should be developed, including postgraduate study, micro-credentials, and flexible roles across schools.

The music industry also has a key role to play. Creating pathways for teaching artists—supported by targeted credentials—would strengthen classroom delivery while supporting more sustainable careers for artists including contemporary and community musicians.

Partnerships with arts organisations should also be strengthened through national coordination and investment, ensuring high-quality programs reach more schools—especially in underserved communities.

Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist to ensure there are competent, confident, and well supported teachers and teaching artists to deliver quality music education in every primary school to every child.



Recommendation 4

Track Progress through National Data

Stronger national data is essential to support effective policy, investment, and accountability. Current data gaps limit the ability to plan strategically, target resources, and measure progress.

A coordinated national approach should track teacher readiness, program delivery, and student access. The ACER Primary Teachers' Survey in NSW and South Australia demonstrates the value of this approach, providing insights that support modelling and costings.

Expanding this work nationally will enable better decision-making, more targeted investment, and measurable system-wide improvement.

Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure needs to include consistent collection of quality data, along with bricks and mortar.

About Music Education: Right from the Start

Music Education: Right from the Start is a national collaborative initiative working towards a clear vision: that every Australian primary school student receives a quality, sequential and ongoing music education. Led by Alberts | The Tony Foundation and shaped by a broad coalition of partners across education, industry, academia, research, philanthropy and policy, the initiative aims to strengthen the place and purpose of music within a well-rounded education. Through collaboration, research and advocacy, it seeks to identify barriers, address systemic inequities and partner with decision-makers to shape practical, system-wide solutions to achieve our shared vision.

About Alberts

Alberts is an Australian family business with a long history of backing pioneers and a mission to create a vibrant, sustainable future. Founded in 1885, it has made a significant contribution to Australia's cultural fabric, deeply intertwined with music, entertainment and the arts. Led by the fifth-generation, Alberts continues to create positive change across investing, philanthropy, advocacy and collaboration, underpinned by its impact framework. The Tony Foundation, its philanthropic arm, aims to improve life outcomes for young Australians through music.

Our Supporters

This submission represents the views of Music Education: Right from the Start, a national collaborative initiative. It has been developed in consultation with the music industry and music education sector, as well as with the broader arts and education sectors. The following organisations and individuals support our recommendations, and represent the range of our collaborators, including performing arts companies and presenters, international music recording and publishing companies, music industry professional associations, music education professional associations, music education providers both non-profit and commercial, philanthropists and academics. Other collaborators have chosen to support these recommendations within their own submissions.

Individuals

- Mr Damian Trotter, Managing Director, Sony Music Publishing Australia
- Dr Anita Collins, Senior Adviser Music Education: Right from the Start, musician, educator, researcher
- Dr Fiona Phillips, Lecturer, Arts Education (Music), Deakin University
- Dr Jason Goopy, Senior Lecturer in Music Education, Edith Cowan University
- Mr Jason Boron, Lecturer in Music Education & First Year Coordinator BEd (Primary), Edith Cowan University
- Dr Renée Crawford, Associate Professor Education, Faculty of Education, Monash University.
- Ms Carmen Schoenborn, Composer, Performer, Educator

Music Industry



Music Education Professional Associations



Performing Arts Companies and Presenters

ACO Australian Chamber Orchestra



Music Education Providers



Philanthropists



Crecererelle Foundation

Day Family Foundation



For further assistance
please contact:

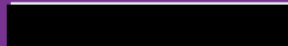
Emily Albert

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Music Education: Right from the Start acknowledges the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first inhabitants of the nation and the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we live, learn, and work. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and acknowledge the continuing significance of their culture across these lands.
