

Beth Appleton



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To whom it concerns,

Before anything else, I want to acknowledge that I believe I have missed the formal submission deadline, and I am grateful if this contribution can still be considered. I write as a board member of the Australian Children's Music Foundation, and I want to register my full support for ACMF's own submission to this review.

Personal Submission to the Revive National Cultural Policy Review Beth Appleton

I am writing this submission personally, drawing on more than 20 years working inside the Australian and international music industry. Over that time I have seen, from both inside the industry and from a distance, what foundational music education does for children, and what its absence costs them and our music industry potential.

I want to begin with the part of the argument that is too often left out of policy submissions. The case that matters most: music makes children well. Music makes children happier. It gives lonely children a place to belong. It gives anxious children something to put their hands on. It teaches emotional regulation in a way no app or program can replicate. A child singing in a room with other children is doing something that protects their mental health, builds their confidence and connects them to others, all at once.

This is not a sentimental claim. A 2025 Edith Cowan University systematic review concluded that music learning should be treated as a core wellbeing strategy in schools, not an extracurricular activity, and called for every child to have access to quality music education given rising youth mental health concerns.¹ At a time when Australian governments are spending heavily on youth mental health and student wellbeing frameworks, music education is one of the most evidenced and lowest cost interventions available, and it is delivered inside the school day, with children we already have in front of us.

If Revive does nothing else for primary schools, it should ensure that no Australian child grows up without this.

What the international comparison shows

Most of the countries Australia compares itself to have already decided this question. Finland: music is a compulsory subject from grade 1 to grade 9, and primary teacher training includes 350 hours of music education, compared to roughly 9 hours in an Australian primary teaching degree. South Korea: 160 hours of teacher training. Estonia: music compulsory from grade 1 all the way to grade 12, treated as part of national cultural identity. Sweden, Norway and Denmark publicly subsidise music education well beyond the classroom.² Australia: 63% of schools offer no music instruction at all, and only 23% of

government school music programs are taught by specialist music teachers, compared to 88% of private schools.³ We are not in step with comparable nations. We are an outlier.

The investment signal

The National Cultural Policy allocated \$2.6 million to in-school arts initiatives over five years. STEM education received \$75.6 million in the same period. The ratio of roughly 1 to 29 is not a rounding issue. It is a statement about which forms of childhood learning the country considers foundational.

The skills cliff inside Australian classrooms

Recent NSW research found that more than 73% of primary teachers do not feel confident independently delivering music, even though 90% of them recognise its cognitive, social and emotional benefits. Hours of music tuition in Primary Initial Teacher Education have more than halved over the last 13 years. Teachers who were never trained cannot deliver. Children who are never taught cannot become audiences, artists, or simply adults who carry music through their lives.

What I have seen in 20 years

When I was SVP Global Marketing at Warner Music in 2014, Australia was the world's 6th largest recorded music market, a position it had held since 2007. By 2018 we had fallen to 8th. As of 2024, Australia is out of the IFPI top 10 entirely, for the first time since 1996.⁴ Markets do not fall like this by accident. They fall when the entry point is starved. I have watched gifted young people walk away from music careers not because they lacked talent, but because they were never given a foundation to build on. I have watched regional and low ICSEA communities walled off from the industry by postcode. None of this is recoverable at the professional end of the pipeline. It is decided years earlier, in classrooms most policy documents never reach.

What I am asking Revive to do

Establish a Creative Arts Education pillar inside the National Cultural Policy, with the same weight and accountability as the existing five. Pair it with four concrete actions:

- A federal commitment to one hour per week of sequential, year round music education from Kindergarten to Year 8, consistent with the Mparntwe Declaration and bringing Australia closer to the international standard.
- Formal recognition by the Department of Education that sequential music and songwriting are primary delivery mechanisms for the National Student Wellbeing Framework, allowing schools to direct existing wellbeing investment into proactive creative programs.
- A national ACER led audit of music education access, so that music deserts can be identified and resources directed under the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement.
- An Allied Support workforce model, where working teaching musicians are embedded in classrooms alongside generalist teachers. This solves two problems at once. It gives children access to expertise their teacher was never trained to provide, and it gives musicians the stable, dignified employment the Centrality of the Artist pillar already promises.

A final point

Revive succeeded at the top of the pipeline. Its long term success, both as a cultural policy and as a wellbeing policy, depends on whether it now reaches the bottom of it. I believe this is the most important decision the policy will make.

Kindest Regards

Beth Appleton [REDACTED]

References 1. Goopy, J. and MacArthur, S. L. R. (2025). Music learning and school aged children's and adolescents' wellbeing: A scoping review. Edith Cowan University. Summary at neurosciencenews.com/music-learning-emotion-29432 2. Music Mark, "Music education compared in countries around the world", citing The Music Trust survey data. musicmark.org.uk/news/music-education-compared-in-countries-around-the-world 3. The Music Trust (Petrova survey), "Some interesting music education research outcomes". musictrust.com.au/music-education/research/some-interesting-music-education-research-outcomes 4. IFPI Global Music Report, 2019, 2024 and 2025 editions. ifpi.org