

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Submitted: On behalf of an organisation with arts-components (e.g. community organisation, tourism, venue, health, education etc)

What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you? Feel free to respond to any or all pillars:

The Centrality of the Artist

The Elder Conservatorium of Music at The University of Adelaide is a home of music and culture in South Australia. In a rapidly changing artistic landscape, the Elder Conservatorium a crucial site of cultural preservation and innovation, seeding the music practitioners, teachers, and audiences of the future.

The broader submission from The University of Adelaide references the Elder Conservatorium of Music's pioneering work in the Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music, as well as our Open Music Academy's contribution to access.

This submission from The Elder Conservatorium of Music addresses the issue of **Music Education** which falls under the pillar of **The Centrality of the Artist** but is also directly relevant to the concepts of **Participation and Inclusion** and a **Thriving Arts and Cultural Sector**.

Music education as a tool for equity

The benefits of music education are well-documented and incontrovertible. As listed in the 2019 report "Music Education: A Sound Investment", commissioned by the philanthropic Tony Foundation and led by the educator and researcher Dr Anita Collins, they include improvements to working memory, logic processing and literacy; the fostering of empathy; the establishment of more robust immune systems; the prevention of "self-esteem decline"; a reduction in depression and mental illness; and the enhancement of social cohesion, compassion and cooperation. However, in Australia currently many of these benefits are available only to the privileged, as too many of our children miss out on a music education.

This is a problem with repercussions for artists, and part of a broader trend worldwide, as numerous international studies point to disproportionate number of theatre makers, writers and musicians hailing from privileged backgrounds, resulting in a lack of representation in our stories and on our stages. But the issue is not only representation within the sector, but the many documented benefits of arts education to the child citizen.

According to the executive summary of the longitudinal "Champions of Change" study in the United States, which tracked 25,000 students over 10 years, arts education is a powerful tool for equity with "high arts participation [making] a more significant difference to students from low-income backgrounds than for high-income students". In Australia, education organisation The Song Room rolls out programs to children from low socioeconomic, Indigenous and non-English speaking backgrounds, along with those at elevated risk of juvenile crime. Documented benefits of these "arts-based interventions" range from school attendance (65 per cent improvement) to academic achievement (the equivalent of a one-year gain in literacy) to enhanced social and emotional wellbeing.

In the absence of any national policy, such measures are enacted haphazardly around the country, thanks to passionate individuals and private organisations. Music education in schools has fallen between the gaps in our federation, with some states doing markedly better than others.

By way of example, Queensland has been a national leader in musical training since 1971, when it began its Instrumental Music Program in state schools. It now provides tuition for more than 50,000 students in small group lessons, in preparation for large ensemble performances. Music has also been a mandatory part of the state's primary curriculum for many years, and the combination of these two factors has fostered much greater equity in musical training than elsewhere in Australia.

In 2019 the Music Education Strategy was rolled out in South Australia with bipartisan support, centring on primary-school music education, with an emphasis on vocal music-making as an entry point. A central tenet is the support of non-specialist music teachers through the provision of professional development, and curriculum guides and resources. Such support is critical when – according to a 2009 national audit – Australian primary-school teachers receive an average of less than 17 hours of music training over the course of their teaching qualifications.

A National Approach

These are important first steps, but our children deserve a coherent national approach. All the research into the benefits of music points to the need for a continuous, sequential and developmental education. In Finland, the access of every child to a musical education is mandated by law, beginning in pre-school and continuing through primary school for two to four hours each week. Specialised music teachers are highly respected, and paid commensurately, with fierce competition for education degrees.

The musical health of our society requires interventions at multiple entry points: children, teachers, performers, audiences, amateurs, parents. Conservatoriums play a key role in all of these, as a home to music of all kinds in our communities, and deserve real support, speaking to the **Strong Institutions** pillar.

To have the value of music education enshrined in a National Cultural Policy would be an important first step towards real oversight of our country's, and particularly our children's, musical health.