

The Music Trust

Submission for the National Cultural Policy August 202

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The word 'culture' has many disparate meanings. Most broadly, it means the way we live, the things we value and dislike, what is familiar or characteristic for us and so on; Australian culture has included Vegemite and Holdens. A culture can be something we grow in a laboratory. A person can be described as 'cultured'.

This submission assumes that the national cultural policy will deal primarily with the arts. Culture = the arts. We will primarily address music because music is our area of expertise.

There is a large 'music industry'. As an industry, its value is often described in terms of the value of sales, the number of listeners and these things are somewhat independent of musical character or quality.

Of course, the livelihoods of music-makers depend primarily upon sales, whether via concert tickets, copyright, recordings, fees, salaries. The survival of the artform depends upon the survival of the artists and their practice of the arts and that must be a concern of a cultural policy.

But at the core of the policy must be consideration of the intrinsic value of the art, in this case the music. Its contents, its structure, its craft, its effects on the listener. The effects can to an extent be thought of as including its uses.

- It is a theory of the origin of music that it served to bring a community together in confronting adversity. Less existential: to share the music making; to share the listening or the dancing.
- Listening as a simple pleasure. Listening for emotional arousal, or calming. Listening for the most profound emotional experience.
- Listening to trigger life's memories. Use as emotional therapy, or as an aspect of medical treatment in e.g. stroke.
- Music as a marker of identity, belonging.
- Music as an aspect of intellect, calling upon cognitive abilities to construct music to communicate or recognise both a cognitive and emotional message.

Centuries after it was written, we still listen to the music of Bach and Beethoven and many others, not because they had high sales but because with among the most brilliant minds in the history of our species, they created music of enormous cognitive and emotional content and impact.

Music can be just fun, or the site of the deepest endeavour and profundity of experience.

The vitality of the arts in Australia depends ultimately on a population that is committed and skilled as artists and/or as audiences, arts consumers.

Research by the Knight Foundation (USA) investigated what childhood experiences in music would result in children becoming ticket buyers for concerts as adults. Many professional music companies such as orchestras organise performances for children as an audience-building strategy. Knight discovered that this strategy is not effective. Rather, what is effective is teaching children to perform music.

Furthermore, some decades of research has shown that a continuous, sequential, developmental education in music, especially in musical performance, has non-musical benefits. These can include improvement in reading and mathematics, concentration, self-confidence, socialising... The improvements can be spectacular: see the information on the Feversham Primary Academy belowⁱ and in this video.

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=rJDabEvbl6M>

An arts or cultural ministry does not have the responsibility or budget to support arts education. However, in Australia, the education ministries at both Commonwealth and state levels show little interest in arts education. This is especially so for education of young children at the primary school level.

There is evidence that the non-musical benefits of music education are a consequence of its unique effects on brain development, especially in young children. (View this video.) Yet it is precisely the young who miss out on competent arts education.

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=ROJKCYZ8hng>

It is difficult to assemble useful statistics on the provision of arts education to primary school children. They are well served in private schools but that accounts for only about one in six children. Queensland employs specialist music teachers for government primary schools and they reach about 87% of children, those that are geographically accessible. My estimate for the NSW public system is that 85% of primary school children receive NO classroom music education. And the state does not provide instrumental instruction to primary schools. The situation is similar in most other states.

There are music curricula, both the national curriculum prepared by the Commonwealth, and state variants. The teaching responsibility is assigned to the primary school generalist classroom teachers. "Generalist" indicates a responsibility to teach all subjects.

Some years ago I organised a survey of the mandatory music education provided in the undergraduate courses for primary school teachers. The national average was 14 hours of instruction. That is not the annual number of hours, it is the total number for the course. With this, they were supposed to be able to teach music for seven years – K to 6. A couple of years ago, I investigated the current provision in NSW. 12¾ hours. This is futile and a sort of dishonesty.

The probable reason that 85% of NSW primary classes do not include music is that the teachers know that they do not have the requisite skills and simply set it aside. And their principals and the hierarchy allow it.

The national curriculum in the arts includes five art forms: dance, drama, media, music, visual arts. It's good to have these curricula should someone decide to teach them. The concept seemed to be that all children should learn all five art forms. But no-one really figured out how, in current circumstances, that could happen. If it were to be the responsibility of each classroom teacher, each

would need skills in each art form. This is not book learning. Skills are required. How many people do you know who are skilled in five art forms? Or even one?

Note that it is the universities that decide on the level of time and resources committed to the arts education of trainee teachers. In the absence of any meaningful requirement by the potential employers of their graduates, we have been informed that the decisions are being made on the basis of their estimated costs.

Teaching the arts in primary school requires teachers with the necessary skills. Generalist teachers in Korea received 180 hours of preservice music education. In Finland, they received twice as many. In Australia, they receive about a dozen. How could our primary school teacher workforce acquire the necessary skills?

Say each was given 100 hours of professional music education. The public systems have approximately 100,000 primary teachers. One doesn't need to do further calculations to believe this isn't going to happen!

The better and most practical solution is to train and employ specialist music teachers. The same could be done for each of the other four art forms. Schools need not offer all five arts. Perhaps they could offer two on an extended basis, with some workshops in the other three.

We note that based on the accounts from Feveringham, some English primary schools are taught by subject area specialists. It would be possible for primary school teachers to specialise in say three or four subjects. (There are complaints from the profession that "core" subjects are being taught by teachers without the necessary knowledge.) Each child would be taught by a team of teachers with complementary groups of subjects. This happens elsewhere e.g. Hong Kong. For pastoral care purposes, each class could have one teacher assigned also as the classroom teacher.

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As recognised above, school education in the arts is not the business of the Arts Minister.

However, assuming that it is the exclusive business of the Ministers for Education has not been a productive concept.

We most strongly recommend that the Minister for the Arts seeks the collaboration of the Minister for Education in providing an effective education in the arts to Australian school children and their teachers.

ⁱ <https://musictrust.com.au/loudmouth/music-improves-behaviour-and-english-results-at-feversham-primary/>