

# Fading Notes:

## Music Education for the Next Generation of Primary Teachers

A summary paper of key findings and solutions on the provision of music education in Australian primary teaching degrees

June 2023



## Alberts | The Tony Foundation's *Music Education: Right from the Start* initiative partnered with distinguished music learning experts and researchers Dr Anita Collins and Dr Rachel Hocking to examine the state of music education among emerging primary school teachers across Australia.

The research focuses on:



The presence, methods and prominence of compulsory music training within Initial Teacher Education (ITE) degrees.



An indication of music knowledge, skills, competency, and confidence among ITE students preparing to enter the profession.



Observed trends in ITE students' attitudes towards music education, pathways to skills development and classroom expectations.

The research is based on an online survey of lecturers responsible for music education within ITE degrees from 36 of the 49\* universities invited to participate. These lecturers represent a student pool of more than 4,600 primary teaching students across 73% of universities delivering primary teaching degrees across Australia. Of these 36, 23 participated in structured qualitative interviews. In addition, an analysis of websites and course handbooks from all 49 universities was undertaken.

The methodology was designed by Dr Anita Collins and the Project Team, and the research and analysis were completed by Dr Rachel Hocking in December 2022. The full research and results are available in Collins, A. & Hocking, R. (2023) *Fading notes: The state of music education for the next generation of primary teachers* – full report. Alberts | The Tony Foundation.

\*Where a university has different state-based campuses, each is counted separately within the total of 49.



### COMMISSIONED BY

Music Education: Right from the Start

### FUNDED BY

Day Family Foundation

### DESIGNED AND LED BY

Dr Anita Collins in consultation with  
Eric Sidoti, Emily Albert

### RESEARCHED AND WRITTEN BY

Dr Rachel Hocking

### RESEARCH DESIGN REVIEWED BY

Louise Barkl, Educational Consultant  
Dr Rachael Dwyer, University of Sunshine Coast  
Dr Jason Goopy, Edith Cowan University  
Dr Neryl Jeanneret, University of Melbourne  
Dr Tanya Vaughan, ACER

### FINDINGS & SOLUTIONS REVIEWED BY

Expert Advisory Panel of School Principals, Department  
of Education advisors, University teaching academics

# Foreword

Welcome to our new report, *Fading Notes: the State of Music Education for the next generation of primary teachers*. It is the latest instalment of an ongoing partnership between Alberts | The Tony Foundation and Dr Anita Collins, examining the delivery of music education and access to music learning among Australian primary school students.

It follows the landmark 2020 report that confirmed the connections between music learning and childhood development. This time, we shine a light on whether teachers are equipped and supported to bring this important part of the Australian curriculum into primary classrooms.

Through a survey of universities across Australia and an analysis of the treatment of music education in primary teaching degrees, we have explored the pathways currently in place for teachers to be both competent and confident in delivering quality music education.

The research ultimately concludes that diminishing levels of music education within generalist primary teaching degrees leave most teachers underprepared to meet the realities of the classroom and expectations of the curriculum. This likely extends to other areas of 'The Arts' learning area as well.

Most graduates wrongly believe they won't have to teach music, which will be the role of specialists, and most graduates never observe a music lesson in a live setting before giving one themselves.

Narrow pathways to pre-service professional development and music specialisation further underscore the music skills gap in the primary school system and the missed development opportunities for students.

However, there are many examples of universities prioritising music education, delivery of innovative learning techniques and dedication to professional development pathways. Some of these are instructive in navigating the complex issue of ensuring a quality music education for Australian students and advancing short- and long-term solutions.



# The state of music education in primary teaching degrees

## Music education training time reaches an all-time low

Despite the developmental benefits of music learning and an Australian curriculum that relies on generalist primary educators to teach music, the average training time has more than halved since 2009. Concerningly, this confirms that music education and training for primary school teachers is at an all-time low and at risk of moving lower amid literacy and numeracy pressures.



Down  
**53%**  
in 14 years



2009  
**17 hours**

Average music education  
training time in ITE

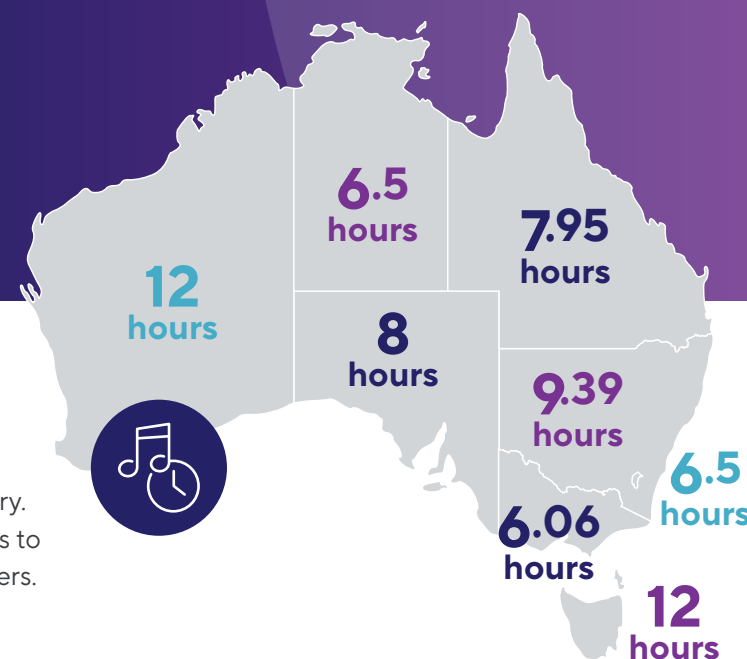


2022  
**8 hours**

Average music education  
training time in ITE

## Average compulsory music education hours

The training time dedicated to music education varies across the country. While some states, such as Queensland, use music specialists in schools to teach music, others, such as New South Wales, rely on generalist teachers.



## Inadequate incentives, insufficient emphasis on music skills

Today, music education is not a standalone subject in most primary teaching degrees. Instead, it is taught as one of five disciplines comprising The Arts learning area. The fractional credit point value afforded to this area belies its sheer breadth and importance, and teachers are not receiving the training to support their early careers.

### Credit points awarded



**1%**

average credit point value for music as part of overall degree

### Practical learning opportunities



**21%**

of teaching students observe a music class in a live setting

### No. of compulsory Arts units



**79%**

of universities offer one mandatory arts unit covering all five (four in NSW) arts areas

### Assessment methods



**~70%**

teach and assess music education as part of an integrated Arts area

### Knowledge transfer gap



**20%**

of university staff teaching music education are not qualified in music education themselves

## Delivery of music education

Units of learning that focus on music are largely delivered in a mix of online and face-to-face settings, with around one in four opting for an entirely in-person experience where more depth in teaching can be achieved.

**27%** of the music education component of degrees is delivered in an entirely face-to-face learning environment

**70%** of the music education component of degrees is delivered in a hybrid learning environment

## Impediments building the required skill base

Many Arts units offer only a gentle introduction to music education that doesn't cover activities typically featured in primary school programs. Low levels of prior musical knowledge and lack of available electives mean teachers must seek further professional development post-graduation.

**67%** of universities do not offer a music specialisation

**66.86 hours** the average training hours where a music specialisation is available (non-COVID impacted year)

## Preparedness moving into the profession

Most course decision-makers believe students have low to moderate confidence and competence to teach music at the end of their degrees. As a result, one in two feel further professional development will be required.

### Confidence and competence



**14%**

agreed that 80% of graduates could confidently and competently teach music to Australian curriculum grade 6 level

### Classroom expectations



**71%**

say their students do not expect to teach music in the classroom

### Finishing skills



**50%**

say most students would need further development to teach music effectively

### Further development



**26%**

say their students expect to undertake further development

## Graduate numbers with specialist skills

With no music specialisation available among almost seven in ten courses, it is no surprise that the number of generalist teaching students graduating in 2021 with a specialisation is low. Of the approximately 4,670 teachers entering all general teaching placements each year, and based on an aggregate total extrapolated from this research, only 3.82% had specialisations.

## The impact on primary school children

Previous research conducted in 2020 already revealed that a large proportion of Australian primary school students have little or no access to music education. It also confirmed the benefits of a quality, ongoing and sequential music education, with an outsized impact on:



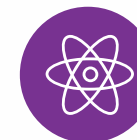
### Physical development and practical skills

- Understanding space and time
- Helping attitudes, behaviours, and teamwork



### Learning development

- Processing sound
- Assigning sound to symbols
- Logic processing
- Memory function



### Human development

- Understanding of self
- Regulation of self
- Mental health
- Healthy development
- Social cohesion

# Solutions and recommendations for change

While ITE degree reform is imperative for music education and 'The Arts' learning area, course redesign and reaccreditation can be time-consuming. It would deny teachers and students more immediate support if pursued in isolation. The research has unearthed short- and longer-term solutions to enhance teachers' capacity to deliver a quality music education. These are detailed below and include:

<b>System changes and reform</b> (LONG-TERM)	Degree curriculum reform	Teaching practice reform	Degree specialisation reform	
<b>Lecturer and teacher support</b> (SHORT-TERM)	Free in-service courses to augment degrees	Professional recognition for music	Public education and advocacy to drive awareness	
<b>In-service teaching and development</b> (MEDIUM-TERM)	Highly recommended professional development for early and mid-career teachers	Experienced teacher mentoring and development programs	System-wide professional development for teachers	Post-graduate micro-credentialling



# System changes and reform (long-term)

The following are potential solutions to enhance teachers' capacity to deliver quality music education once they enter the profession.

No potential solution is favoured over any other solution at this point.



## ITE degree curriculum reform

Increase the length, scope, quality and credit point value of music education and other arts areas in primary teaching degrees. This could be done by a state-based test case.

Potential stakeholders: **Universities**



## ITE degree teaching practice reform

Ensure primary teaching students observe and participate in music lessons whilst on practicum. It should be noted that ensuring that the ITE students observe quality music education is essential.

Potential stakeholders: **Universities**



## ITE degree specialisation reform

Advocate for K-12 degrees with music specialisations so that there are pathways and qualifications for those who want to become primary music specialists. This solution is already underway in several institutions.

Potential stakeholders: **Universities, System employers and School Leaders**



# Lecturer and teacher support (short-term)

The following are potential solutions to enhance teachers' capacity to deliver quality music education once they enter the profession.

No potential solution is favoured over any other solution at this point.



## ITE degree augmentation

Develop free in-service music education courses that can be run both for primary teaching students and for early career teachers. Ensuring there is no cost to the students is essential.

**Potential stakeholders:** Universities, System employers and music education training providers



## ITE professional recognition

Provide more support for primary music lecturers, such as creating a national award to recognise excellence and/or assist with any advocacy needed.

**Potential stakeholders:** Professional Music Associations and Philanthropy



## ITE Public Education

Raise awareness of the difference between music specialists and arts specialists, including a specialisation profile for music specialists to direct effective in-service professional development (PD) plans.

**Potential stakeholders:** Universities, System employers and State/ Federal Accrediting bodies



## ITE Advocacy

Raise awareness of the lack of fair access that current Australian children have to quality music teaching in Australian schools, tailored to audiences.

**Potential stakeholders:** National Advocates, Parent Representative Bodies, School Principal associations



# In-service teaching and development (medium-term)

The following are potential solutions to enhance teachers' capacity to deliver quality music education once they enter the profession.

No potential solution is favoured over any other solution at this point.



## PD for early career teachers 1-5 years

Increase the availability and access to music education professional development for all early career teachers. Use the arts specialist profile tool to identify the amount, type and focus that each teacher needs to reach the standard to deliver quality music education.

Teacher cover and additional funding incentives provided by Federal and State governments to schools to engage in music education PD.

**Potential stakeholders:** System and school employers, school leaders, music education training providers; Federal and State Government funding



## PD for mid-career teachers 10-15 years

Increase the availability and access to music education professional development for all mid-career teachers who have not undertaken music education PD since they finished their degree.

Teacher cover and additional funding incentives provided by Federal and State governments to schools to engage in music education PD.

**Potential stakeholders:** System and school employers, school leaders, music education training providers; Federal and State Government funding



## Experienced teacher mentoring and development program

In-service teachers who have undertaken music education PD and have been delivering music education continually for over 3 years can enter into a mentoring and development program to upskill all generalist teachers in their schools. This would be a higher duties position with a shared payment between State Government and School budgets. This would be a nationally accredited program.

**Potential stakeholders:** System and school employers, school leaders, music education training providers; Federal and State Government funding



## System wide PD for teachers

School systems (Government, Catholic, Independent) develop system wide approaches to upskilling all primary teaching staff to an agreed skill and knowledge level based on the Music Education: Right from the Start Quality Music Education definition.

**Potential stakeholders:** **System employers utilising internal teams and/or external music education providers; 5-10 year funding commitments and project horizons**



## Post graduate micro-credentialling

Universities and adult education providers design and deliver, both face-to-face and online, a post-graduate micro-credential which is recognised by State Education Departments. This micro-credential would fulfil some, or all, of the agreed requirements and assessments to ensure teacher skills and knowledge that would meet the level based on the Music Education: Right from the Start Quality Music Education definition. The micro-credential could be valid for 5 years.

**Potential stakeholders:**  
**Universities utilising internal teams and/or external music education providers supervised by university liaisons; Federal and State Government funding**

# Music Education: Right from the Start Initiative

Music Education: Right from the Start is a collaborative national initiative, led by Alberts | The Tony Foundation, and driven by our collective belief in the power of music to change lives.

It focuses on the place and purpose of music within a quality education, and how to ensure access for all Australian primary school children.

It has been developed in consultation with, and is supported by, individuals and organisations spanning the music industry, education, research and philanthropy.

### CONTACT

Emily Albert, Executive Director, [ealbert@alberts.co](mailto:ealbert@alberts.co)  
Eric Sidoti, Project Lead, [esidoti@alberts.co](mailto:esidoti@alberts.co)

[www.alberts.co/music-education/](http://www.alberts.co/music-education/)

### CITATION

Collins, A. & Hocking, R. (2023)  
*Fading notes: The state of music education for the next generation of primary teachers* – summary report.  
Alberts | The Tony Foundation.

### THIS RESEARCH WAS FUNDED BY

DAY FAMILY  
FOUNDATION