



Sydney Conservatorium of Music, University of Sydney Submission to the Higher Education Review

31 July 2008

Introduction

Any review of Australia's higher education system must of necessity address higher education's contribution to the nation's economic future.

As we shift from co-dependency on government funding to independent leadership, the arts and their interaction with higher education will be pivotal – especially as philanthropy plays an increasing role in both the arts and higher education.

As Australia's leading music school in the tertiary and secondary education sectors, the Sydney Conservatorium of Music (SCM) is uniquely placed to offer comment on how best Australia can invest in musical education that best contributes to Australia's economic wellbeing.

However, we are also committed to a set of educational values that transcend the purely economic. Tertiary education should always strive to embody values that underpin a truly civil society, a truly creative society, a truly enriching culture.

In our research the Sydney Conservatorium of Music aspires to truth; in education, fullness and depth beyond simply the provision of job-ready skills. These values, we believe, help underpin the core values of Australian society – those of accountable democratic government, compassion, opportunity and a sense of the place for every Australian.

We believe that economic wellbeing walk hand in hand with these fundamental values in any society. And nowhere is this more apparent than in the "music and performing arts" sector.

In 1985 a study conducted by the Music Council of Australia estimated that the music industry accounted for 0.7% of Australia's GDP. Given the relative growth of the services sector in the past two decades (in particular mobile telephony and other digitally-based services), that proportion can reasonably be assumed to have grown.

But even at 0.7% of GDP, according to the *Economist* magazine's recent *Country Briefing*, the value of the Australian music industry would be in the order of \$7.5 billion.

In this context we feel the Sydney Conservatorium of Music can provide an invaluable perspective on Australia's higher education system.



Australia's higher education system should be marked by a capacity to:

3.1 Meet the needs of the labour market and industry for high level skills

2. Are there impediments to the higher education sector being able to innovate in the development of courses and programs? What are these impediments and how could they be removed?

The main impediments to the higher education sector being able to innovate in the development of courses and programs to meet the rapidly changing needs of the labour market are as follows:

- Funding constraints and increased requirements for international accreditation are forcing institutions to reduce UG numbers. For example at the Sydney conservatorium our undergraduate courses barely have the resources to cover the basic skills, let alone the secondary skills which provide depth in future leadership.
- Changing fee structures are having unintended negative impact on learning experiences and outcomes.

For example, ten years ago all music students could learn their principal instrument, and piano, and often a secondary instrument. In today's funding environment the "credit hours" do not allow for even piano study let alone a second instrument – a capability required in international peer programs. Importantly, students of Music Education, Musicology, and Composition should all also have instrumental lessons and performance experience.

Almost every program in the country has had to delete this vital component for our Australian students. Ultimately this will produce a brain-drain in our creative sector.

- Disparate control, funding and philosophical approaches arising from Australia's Federal system impede Australia's ability to position itself strategically for international competitiveness.
- The expectation that class sizes will become larger will act as a break on attractive high quality full fee paying students from overseas, and an incentive for Australia's most talented young musicians to gain their educations overseas

Removing these impediments can best be achieved by:

- Australia should encourage greater philanthropy via tax incentives. Such models in the United States are well-founded to promote philanthropy in the arts and education as well as the environmental and health costs which are of great concern to all nations.



For example, in the 1980s, when President Reagan cut the premium funding for the Arts in the US to the lowest levels in recorded history, he also adopted tax incentives which then prompted corporate support in unparalleled dimensions.

In general, 5-9% of the Gross national budget is historically contributed to the Arts through philanthropy in the USA.

Promoting academic collaboration. Experience in Europe and the USA has confirmed that when choreographers and musicians and designers work together one can generate something as monumental as Paris in the 30s, with Picasso Diaghilev, Stravinsky Ravel and others.

In universities where students have the opportunity to appreciate one or more of the arts their creativity is also heightened in the sciences and so forth. There have been terrific connections between the visual arts and the sciences over the past 150 years. These connections have been critical to bringing science into everyday life.

- Greater collaboration with business and the corporate sector. For example, Indiana University recently ran a scheme to bring artwork to corporate atriums. Part of a re-branding of Indianapolis from a race-car city to one of cultural excitement, the scheme profited the university, the community and the corporate sectors with new key businesses attracted to relocate in the State.
- Enhanced use of online technologies supported by global quality broadband. The SCM's iCon project is developed to facilitate international master-classes and open lessons; to provide music lessons throughout rural outback Australia; to allow for several universities to host a PhD program; and for Australian universities to share resources in niche markets.
- In intense programs such as veterinary science, dentistry and music where one-on-one teaching is essential, there should be an appropriate banding to allow for the expense of such education, or premium funding set-up for the creative visual and performing arts comparable to the British models.

In the UK, after research regulations prevented the arts from receiving funding through universities, within a decade virtually all of the music programs exited universities. The British government then put in place a parallel scheme for premium funding in the arts, comparable to but larger than the Australia Council.



3. What are the appropriate mechanisms at the national and local level for ensuring higher education meets national and local needs for high level skills? What is the role of State and Territory governments in this area?

Governments could help shift the culture with matching funds for philanthropic contributions; tax incentives to encourage philanthropy; lifting fee caps and reviewing research funding rules.

4. How adequate are the mechanisms for aligning supply and demand of graduates? How do pricing and labour market signals impact on student choices?

Financial choices are currently being made -in an environment characterised by increasing fees and extremely limited number of endowed scholarships.

Given the financially uncertain nature of a career in the music sector, the current lack of endowed scholarships creates an additional disincentive for students and their parent's contemplating tertiary studies in music. Australia is currently well short of the United States, where roughly 80% of tuition costs are covered for talented students.

5. Are there particular examples of good practice where you can demonstrate either rapid response to skill shortages or successful initiatives to improve generic skills?

At Sydney Conservatorium of Music we have offered and are planning to enhance a course in piano tuning. As simple as this sounds, there are very few in the country. To put this course through the University sector would take years whereas to put this through professional development, benchmarked on industry standards alone allowed us to run a full course in 2005-2007.

The SCM is just about to launch the revised and lengthened version of this course. While we host this on the premises, it was deemed better to work with industry partners to finance this course and set it up through our Open Academy or community program. This has proven very effective.

6. How effectively are Australian higher education institutions responding to demographic change, especially in providing lifelong learning to meet the challenge of the ageing population and the need for upgrading of skills and re-training?

Most senior educators in the Conservatorium's field head to Stanford or Harvard for short-term professional development. This indicates Australia hasn't established enough lifelong learning courses. At the general staff level, there is therefore a serious shortage of up-to-date skills.

Formal higher education qualifications are of course important but the opportunities for short-term professional development must be in place.



7. What is the relevance and applicability of the findings and approaches proposed in the United Kingdom paper, Higher Education at Work, for increasing skills levels in the workforce to Australia?

Rather than trying to fit the creative and performing arts into a science framework - or to meet such inflexible metrics in a field that is about imagination - the United Kingdom created a separate stream of Premium Funding for the Arts as a whole. This has allowed both systems to flourish and complement each other.

3.2 Opportunities to participate in higher education

8. Should there be a national approach to improving Indigenous and low SES participation and success in higher education?

Yes. In the case of Indigenous Australians in particular, significant resources should be invested into delivering education online via broadband, so as to ensure the delivery of high quality educational resources while enabling students to remain in their communities.

As a general rule, Australia's Indigenous population has a remarkably high level of musical cognition. It is therefore likely that music education could be used as a means of encouraging greater engagement with other subject areas, and generally to improve retention rates in primary and secondary school.

Primary and secondary retention is of course a requirement for participation in higher education and the social and economic mobility that entails. The conservatorium is currently in discussion with Darwin University to provide DU's students with their first access to online music training and in turn to receive for the first time indigenous music and culture via web stream, for study here and abroad.

Incentive schemes to match funds for universities supporting such programs should be considered. In the United States, the programs begin in year 10-12 to accelerate opportunities for Indigenous and other low SES students. Most public universities also run parallel mathematics and english writing courses for students who meet the incoming standards.

9. If you support a national approach to improving Indigenous and low SES participation and success how do you see it being structured, resourced, monitored and evaluated?

Today's youth respond to newer types of learning through web interface, games and listening skills rather than lectures and reading. Drawing them in from their internal curiosity is key and central. Adopting these methods would also enable Australian educators to learn more about providing engaging educational experiences.



11. What evidence is available from institutions about the impact on individuals or groups of either failure to gain income support or the inadequacy of income support?

The large number of Australian tertiary students who for financial reasons study part time are currently not able to access the same quality and scope of activities and resources to which their full-time peers have access.

To entirely replicate full time courses for part time students would be prohibitively expensive for institutions like the Conservatorium. There may be an argument that the cost of increased income support to enable students to attend full time would be less than the cost of establishing stand alone part time courses in parallel with the full time courses.

3.3 Provide students with a stimulating and rewarding higher education experience

12. How can the quality of the student experience within Australia's higher education institutions be monitored nationally? Is there evidence that declining student staff ratios have impacted on the quality of the student experience?

Student staff ratios and the faculty profile are essential are key indicators of the quality of student experiences. Due to diminishing funds many faculties have chosen to hire level A and B lecturers rather than searching for level D and E colleagues.

The Conservatorium currently has almost twice the number of students per staff member when compared with its international peer institutions. Over time, fatigued teachers will produce less and poorer quality research output, and the potential to attract philanthropy and key students at the postgraduate level will be diminished.

If, as we suspect, this story is being repeated throughout Australia's higher education sector, the outlook is dire.

The challenge is of course, to provide flexible offerings while developing a national accreditation plan. Our current quality audits don't go far enough. Once regulated our institutions are on their own. We tend to base our information on assessment methods. The effect is that after decades of Australian benchmarking we have not been competitive with international markets in some fields.

The conservatorium would support the introduction of annual national academic audits



13. How can the quality of learning outcomes in Australian higher education be measured more effectively?

The most effective measure is to track where graduates go after graduating, and what they achieve in leading orchestral positions and performance engagements, academic appointments, arts managements, recordings, and all commissions and performances. An example of a weakness in the current system of measurement is the fact that only works over 20 minutes are recorded. In reality short works can be equally if not more important.

14. How do institutions measure the quality of their learning outcomes and how do they know they are nationally and internationally competitive?

Generally speaking, institutions currently measure the quality of their learning outcomes against the quality of the people who can be attracted to the faculty staff, and by reference to peer industry rankings.

However the current surveys are questionable in that only a few students respond; institutions are so divergent that we end up comparing “apples and kiwi fruit”. Due to low numbers of responding students the results can be skewed by an interest group. International accreditation and peer institution review would be helpful for many of our programs to validate and strategize on future directions.

3.4 Connect effectively with the other education and training sectors

15. To what extent should vocational education and training and higher education continue to have distinctive missions and how should these missions be defined?

Australia should think carefully about why we separate the two missions. At the end of the day, a tertiary education is a beginning. Students and leaders of the future need not only a working skill set, but to be able to pose key questions, to advance our society, to solve problems regardless of the context, and to converse globally. Public Scholars need to be developed as well as researchers and workers.

18. Can institutions provide examples of good practices which have led to movement between the sectors with high levels of credit and good learning outcomes?

The University of Sydney has put forward the first music and medicine degree in the world. We are now in a position to provide a music degree that combines with any other higher education degree through this model.

At the SCM we are discussing how to set up distance learning not only for Darwin, Perth and Tasmania, but now also for Hong Kong and Singapore for PG programs, and components of our UG programs which can be delivered on-line with short-term residencies. This will transform the opportunities for achieving higher degrees in music, and is also a platform to develop



further as we are discussing a three-way international music degree with New York and the UK.

3.5 Higher Education's role in the national innovation system

19. By what mechanisms should research activities in Australian universities be supported?

Alliances with business have not yet taken hold. At the same time while we look to the US models for encouragement we need to recognize that Australia does not provide the same level of Venture Capital, tax incentives and so forth that have allowed the US to move ahead with such support in research for comparable risk. Comparing standards in research and philanthropy, we need to also compare standards with financial and tax incentives.

Australians have had a difficult time to implement and realize many of the great ideas which grew out of university research due to the slow mechanisms to find venture capital to test and then patent (television for example!). If we are looking for overseas partners we need to allow business and venture capital to support innovation rather than "same old" or status quo.

20. On what principles and for what purposes should research activity be concentrated in particular universities or types of universities?

Excellence or selectivity is key to SCM's strategy in defining core business and key choices. Primary source faculty performers, those who have worked with the leading composers and conductors, are the key ingredient to ensuring research and teaching work hand in hand.

21. Do you believe there is a place in Australia's higher education system for universities that are predominantly 'teaching only' universities? If so, why?

In the arts we cannot teach without performing and more and more we can't perform without teaching as the research and preparation for each concert is part of what we pass on to the students. Each year innovation has taken place on the design of instruments, or composers have created new sound concepts. To create this type of new wave, time and structures that allow interdependent work are vital.

"Teaching only" positions tend to have a "second-rate" feel about them. At the same time, trying to force all educators to agree to the current Australian research criteria can be quite destructive for the individual and/or a program.



3.6 Australia's higher education sector in the international arena

22. Are there any unintended consequences of the current approach to internationalisation of higher education in Australia?

The current fee-paying approach is unsustainable, and reduces the guarantee to uphold excellence. The international students will see lower fees here but also fewer scholarships. In Europe and the USA they can attend with hardly any cost due to venture funds and endowments providing major scholarships.

23. What is an appropriate role for government in assisting the Australian higher education system to internationalise? On what principles should this role rest and what purposes should it serve?

Government could provide an extra year to work in Australia for all international students who attend Australian universities. Visas are the concern, and so are working opportunities. In terms of programs is best to let the faculties get on with this as the peer networks are strongest in the professions. Finally, allowing for wireless and highest quality technology to communicate is primary.

24. Can you provide any examples of good practice in encouraging local students to undertake study in other countries?

SCM has a program allowing an undergraduate to study abroad – almost all would take this up if they could fund the travel and housing abroad. In our PG programs we have worked with overseas institutions to cover all costs for a semester abroad.

Similarly the greatest impediment to the SCM's expansion of this is lack of housing for our international students. If universities and/or government could consider subsidized student housing matters would shift dramatically.) If our university could provide housing for international students, this would be a great advantage. At present the cost of living makes Australia perhaps the most expensive international market.

3.7 Contribute effectively to the development of Australia's social and cultural structures and its national and regional economies

25. How would you define knowledge transfer and community engagement in an Australian context?



26. Do you believe that knowledge transfer and community engagement are legitimate and appropriate roles for contemporary higher education institutions? If so, how do you see this additional role for the higher education sector blending with its traditional roles and are there limits to these additional roles?

Absolutely and in particular as students and their families begin to pay for education, they want to know there is more than engineering on offer to their children.

The Cultural institutions become a doorway for philanthropy across the university – a buddy system for scholars. The music programs are a cultural membrane that links directly into the community of all ages, and roles. For fee paying universities a top level performing and visual arts program is an asset for the Vice Chancellor's to leverage. This is visible at all leading institutions in the US for example – as they invest in such programs rather than suggest they are programs to be zero balance at the end of the year.

27. If you think that knowledge transfer and community engagement are appropriate roles for higher education institutions, how do you believe these functions should be funded?

Recent successful examples have funded directly from Presidential or Vice Chancellor funds to top up the banding. Much like a loss leader, at the same time in 98% of the world education market premium funding for the arts is available. Unfortunately the Australia Council won't consider funding tertiary institutions as they are considered to be funded by DEST. However, DEST does not resource creative work. Therefore Australia is the only place I now know where the creative arts miss on both fronts for premium funding.

This has of course created the brain-drain. At the Sydney Conservatorium of Music we have focused on returning mid-career internationally renowned Australians and New Zealanders to work with our students.

The result is that our PG levels of top students increased from 8 to 200 students, coming from 23 countries while attracting major University scholarships due to their outstanding academics. We have focused on being the only music institution in the world to bring performers with PhD or DM status as well as recording contracts as celebrated international performers.

We have redesigned the curriculum to be the only program in the world now meeting both the European and the US accreditation standards which allows for freer exchange and recognition of our students and faculty members.



3.8 Resourcing the system

28. What incentives or unintended consequences are there in the current arrangements for higher education funding?

The current challenges in regard to funding the creative performing and visual arts are problematic in that the tertiary sector cannot really apply to the Australia Council...because we are funded by DEST. At the same time DEST guidelines preclude the recognition of “creative work” in the performing arts as comparable to research.

While the USA has set up parallel schemes and the UK has set aside large amounts of “premium funding”, Australia’s economic architecture is such that high level arts in the tertiary sector miss on both fronts. As Universities rely more fully on philanthropy in the next years, the participation of the performing and visual arts will become more valued as the cultural experience is key to donor cultivation, and to our students becoming broader citizens. The current incentives towards sciences and towards vocational education have precluded interdisciplinary and intra-university collaboration in this country in the arts sector in any case.

The cost of one-on-one teaching is something that needs to be acknowledged and resourced either through banding or through accentuation of the marketing, the language and philanthropy.

Units such as schools or departments should be measured with standardised reporting frameworks covering financial results and educational and research outcomes. VCs would need small analytical staffs to study and help interpret these reports and assist in the VCs dialogue with Deans. This would enable flatter organizational structures, without the costly intermediate formal layers between VCs and Deans. We host far more levels of supervision and audit structures than models in other countries. Additionally, we have greater levels of error due to increasing the number of desks for each decision and discussion.

Units should be freer to gather their own external funds and endowments if they are able, without heavy taxation by the University Centres. Funds management could be centralized but should be transparent. This is all part of the issue of changing the culture in Australia as we go forward.

In the US a private institution delivers 100% of the generated fees from students to a School to teach and provide for research. They additionally provide research and philanthropic incentive plans. In Public institutions, the highest taxation that is assessed to schools is 33% in centralized models and more like 12 % in decentralized models. They have leaner and more flexible HR systems, robust technology and benefits for donors, staff and students who involve themselves in lifelong giving.

In Australia, after central administrative costs, faculties often receive as little as 38% of funding received by universities, and as a result only 20% of the total funds actually go to the students’ education.



This costly administrative burden slows down all decisions and ultimately drains the student opportunities.

29. To what extent are the current funding models adequate to secure the future of Australia's higher education sector? If there are better models, what are they?

The current funding models are not adequate. The cost of an education is massive. If we look at the information in the International Monetary Fund statistics from 2007 we find that Australia used to place in the top 10 for our investments in higher education a decade ago. In 2007, their World Competitiveness Scores rank Australia as the second most resilient economy in the world.

At the same time, while we have invested in infrastructure and other needs which remain in the top 10 for populations over 20 million, Education has fallen to 28th. In other words Australia has not kept pace with the investments in our other sectors, nor realized our international peers are investing in education.

One option would be to privatize some universities, and begin to endow the institutions of quality. Allow all students to apply for fee-paying places at the university. Ultimately we are one of the only countries we know that precludes our own young citizens from purchasing a place should they wish. We allow foreigners to have a priority entry through our current schemes.

30. Are the current institutional arrangements for determining relative funding between higher education institutions appropriate? If not, what changes should be considered?

The great challenge is space and the escalating costs of technology that are lagging in general behind the US and Asia. If we wish to attract international students we really need to address both these infrastructure issues nationally. The rankings that are used to determine the value do not take into account the Student/staff ratio which is critical, or the faculty profiles of level through a blending across institutions. In other countries this is essential primary information for consideration.

As a matter of interest, the 2004 Australian Cultural Tourism report from the Department of Communications, Information, Technology and the Arts indicated that 28.1 % of tourism's total contribution to the GVA or 1.2 % of Australia's GVA came from cultural tourism – the expenditures of international and domestic cultural visitors.

If philanthropy is a key to the future, then cities where industry can enjoy cultural opportunity and ensuring that our students can take part in the cultural opportunities is central to building a foundation of philanthropy. Large businesses are seen to gravitate to supporting institutions of excellence in higher education when they are seen to be supporting such cultural advocacy.



3.9 Governance and Regulation

31. Is it time to reshape tertiary education in Australia and streamline financing and regulatory arrangements? If so, what structural changes would you make and why?

Australia should open up the university entry process to competitive timeframes rather than only allowing first choice to be processed. With regard to finances, the premium funding for the arts and creative work should be separated out of research.

32. Is the level of regulation in the sector appropriate? If not, why not, and what should be done to reduce the level of regulation?

The regulation is far more extensive than our peer sector's in Europe and the USA. Transparency and accountability are needed. At the same time, online payments and distance education offer enormous options in future that we are slow to adopt.

33. Does Australia's Quality Assurance Framework need revision? If so, why? What changes would you make?

34. Are changes required to the Australian Qualifications Framework?

35. Is there more that could be done to improve university governance? How should this be done?

Senates are too large for efficient support and advice to be offered to a university. The Australian HR systems are very outdated and over regulated. One might question whether Universities should have internal mechanisms for handling staff grievances

Conclusion:

The arts showcase the strengths and resources of our Universities and the nation. Higher education has an unparalleled ability to develop community outreach and build strategic partnerships.

Bringing individuals to universities, optimizing intellectual and cultural exchange and sharing resources are the best ways forward for Australia. By shaping community public policy and decision-making to support economic development and education, Australia can align priorities and at the same time enhance the clarity and interconnectedness with which we stake our place in the world.