



## Friends of the School of Music - ANU Inc.

Patron: Her Excellency the Honourable Ms Sam Mostyn AC

28 August 2025

Committee Secretary  
Education and Employment Legislation Committee  
Department of the Senate  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
AUSTRALIA

Dear Sir/Madam

### **Re: Inquiry into Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers**

The Friends of the School of Music are a charity registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission. Established in 1982 (prior to the School amalgamating with the ANU), we support the School of Music and the students who study there through music promotion, fund raising and grant making.

The Friends were distressed to see the School of Music component of the ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences (CASS) Organisational Change Proposal released by the ANU on 03/07/2025. We provided feedback about the proposal to the Vice Chancellor (attached below).

I write now to raise four specific and interrelated governance issues arising from this proposal and the ANU's management of the School of Music.

### **1. ANU Management's abrogation of their legislated responsibility to teach music performance at the highest standard**

The School of Music, founded in Canberra in 1965, was incorporated into the Institute of the Arts in 1988 under the chairmanship of Peter Karmel (immediately following his term as VC of ANU), who steered its amalgamation on 01/01/1992 with the ANU through the ANU Act of 1991. The Act added a new function for the university (Section 5.1.d of the ANU Act 1991) of 'providing facilities and courses at higher education level and other levels in the visual and performing arts, and, in so doing, promoting the highest standards of practice in those fields'. Music is the only performing art taught at ANU.



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The recent ANU proposal for the School of Music is to disestablish seven academic positions currently within the School of Music – more than from any other school in CASS – and fold the remnant into a new ‘School of Creative and Cultural Practice’ as a ‘Music program’. The proposed revision of the Bachelor of Music program ‘will feature program-wide integration of creative practice, collaboration, and music technology, replacing the traditional one-to-one instrumental model’.

The Friends hold the view that teaching music performance to the highest standard requires (among other things) the provision of one-to-one performance teaching. This view is also held by a wide circle of musicians that our members are in close contact with, and by the classical and jazz performance major students of the School whom we have provided financial and other support to over the years.

The ANU proposal, if implemented, would effectively abrogate the university’s responsibility for ‘promoting the highest standards of practice’ in the field of music performance. It would contravene both the letter and the spirit of the Act. Further, for the university management to claim otherwise would be to ignore the feedback about the importance of one-to-one performance teaching given to them in response to the proposal.

*We suggest the Committee **recommend** the Government draw Section 5.1.d of the ANU Act 1991 to the attention of the ANU Council, and ask it to continue to meet its obligations under the Act by*

- i) not implementing the change proposal for the School of Music released on 03/07/2025,*
- ii) continuing to offer a performance major within the B. Mus. Program*
- iii) implementing the recommendations of the 2023 external review of the School of Music*

### **2. Implement the recommendations of the 2023 external review of the ANU School of Music**

This approach, if taken, is entirely in line with the recommendations of the routine external review the School underwent in 2023, which commended ‘the area of performance studies that is a pedagogical strength’. The recommendations of that review provide a clear direction forward for the School, and should be implemented, including the final two which read as follows:

‘That a range of sustainability measures be adopted, including greater engagement with the flexible double degree program, clear pathways to medicine, increasing non-Music elective-taking student numbers from across the University in popular first year courses, diversifying and expanding the



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School's international connections, and adjusting the entry process to the Bachelor of Music in line with the School of Art and Design's approach.

'That a strategic approach to staffing be adopted in which the twin needs of the School's large performance cohort and the School's creative research endeavour are mutually reinforced. At the same time, the School must continue to seek greater parity and diversity in staffing, and address workload concerns and imbalances. A reduction in the number of fixed-term appointments and reliance on casual employees is a key aspect of establishing further stability in the School. The panel suggests that all new appointments (especially in the area of performance studies that is a current pedagogical strength of the school) should have PhD, DMA or equivalent qualifications to ensure a strong development of NTR outputs and activity.'

External independent 5 yearly reviews are an important part of governance of specialist academic areas. Good governance of the School of Music should include thoughtful implementation of the recommendations from its recent review.

### **3. ANU should govern the use of Llewellyn Hall primarily for the performance and teaching of acoustic music**

The amalgamation of the Institute of the Arts with ANU came with the transfer to the ANU (for \$1) of the School of Music's purpose-built building including Llewellyn Hall, which remains Canberra's premiere concert hall. It has excellent acoustics for live acoustic music performance, and has an excellent organ.

The ANU is now managing this important resource of the national capital to solve its (non-music) lecture hall scheduling issues. The School of Music is rumoured to be having trouble booking its own students in for performance assessment. The Canberra Symphony Orchestra, whose performances were one of the reasons the Hall was built in the early 1970s, has had rehearsals cancelled at short notice. Conversely, the ANU makes virtually no effort to attract and promote fine music concerts in the Hall, in contrast to the governing bodies of the top concert hall in every other Australian capital city.

*We suggest the committee **recommend** the ANU be encouraged to optimise the management of Llewellyn Hall to support fine music performance and teaching in the national capital.*

### **4. Use of Endowment Funds given to ANU to support music performance.**



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The ANU 2023 holds over 20 endowments made specifically to support music (<https://www.anu.edu.au/giving/report-to-donors>), most to support music performance.

If the ANU walks away from its responsibility to provide music teaching at the highest level by moving away from one-to-one performance teaching, it would need to explain what will be done with the millions of dollars contributed by donors to the ANU Endowment specifically to support music performance studies. Under the tax laws, these funds can only be used for the purpose specified. Will the ANU donate the money to another institution that supports music performance? Or will it seek to use the funds for purposes other than that for which they were given?

A related matter is the proper maintenance and use of musical instruments given to the School to further the musical training of its students.

*We suggest the Committee **recommend** the Government seek an assurance from the ANU that its endowments made to support music performance continue to be used for the purposes they were given for.*

Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance to the Committee in its inquiry into Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers as this relates to the ANU and its School of Music.

Yours sincerely

Paul Dugdale  
President  
Friends of the School of Music ANU Inc.

Attachment: Letter from President of the Friends of the School of Music to the Vice Chancellor of ANU about the proposed changes to the School of Music



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6<sup>th</sup> August 2025

Prof Genevieve Bell  
Vice Chancellor  
Australian National University  
Acton ACT 0200

Dear Prof Bell

### **Re: Proposed changes to the School of Music**

The Friends of the School of Music were distressed to see the School of Music component of the ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences Organisational Change Proposal you released on 03/07/2025. We submit these comments to you for your consideration.

The Friends are a charity registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission. Established in 1982, we support the School of Music and the students who study there through music promotion, fund raising and grant making.

You propose to disestablish seven academic positions currently within the School of Music – more than from any other school in CASS – and fold the remnant into a new ‘School of Creative and Cultural Practice’ as a ‘Music program’. The proposed Bachelor of Music program ‘will feature program-wide integration of creative practice, collaboration, and music technology, replacing the traditional one-to-one instrumental model’.

In 1991 the Arts Institute, including its School of Music and along with Llewellyn Hall, were absorbed into the ANU through an amendment to its Act, adding a new function for the university of (Section 5.1.d of the ANU Act 1991) ‘providing facilities and courses at higher education level and other levels in the visual and performing arts, and, in so doing, promoting the highest standards of practice in those fields’. Music is the only performing art taught at ANU. To abolish seven positions from the School of Music along with replacing one-to-one performance teaching, and pretend the ANU is continuing to promote the highest standard of practice in music as the Act requires, is misleading at best and certainly goes against the spirit of the Act.



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If your proposal is implemented, it will be the end of the 60-year history of the School of Music as an identifiable institution within the national capital. This will diminish the ANU and diminish the cultural life of our city.

The School has produced many excellent instrument and vocal performers and composers over the years, which the Friends have helped the School track (see <https://music.cass.anu.edu.au/about-us/student-achievement>). Many SoM students have won prestigious domestic and overseas competitions, have had solo performance careers, have performed with domestic and overseas orchestras, chamber ensembles, jazz groups and choirs. It has earned a reputation for high level performance staff and students.

Since being absorbed into the University, the School has enhanced the reputation and standing of the ANU. It has also resulted in many substantial donations and bequests to the ANU's endowment funds. In addition to the funds the Friends have provided, the University Foundation website lists 23 endowments for music, most directed towards classical and jazz performance.

Many of ANU's serious music students are undertaking a second degree as well as learning to perform music at a high level. They are a major asset to the university and should be encouraged by retaining excellent performance faculty and continuing to provide one-to-one teaching. We understand this comes at a cost, with funds for this tuition coming from students and their families, community organisations such as ours, and generous donors. But without the university paying its part, the funds, the talent and ANU's reputation as a centre for music performance and teaching will dry up. The proposed restructure of the Bachelor of Music degree, while including some worthwhile innovations, should continue to offer the opportunity for one-on-one performance teaching.

The changes, particularly the staff reductions, are being proposed in the context of much publicity from the ANU about its unsustainable operational losses. We are not privy to the financial rationale for the changes to the SoM. However, we believe that if the changes are implemented the damage to the ANU's reputation for music will flow through to a greater reduction in revenue from student enrolments, donations, endowments and bequests for music than it will save through the staff cuts. The ANU will be the poorer for it if the proposal is implemented.

Our final comment is that the downgrading of the School of Music to a music program in a school (that does not even mention music in its name) will have a heavy impact on the cultural life of Canberra. The SoM through its staff and students has played significant roles in the Canberra Symphony Orchestra, the Canberra International Music Festival, in the Wesley Music Centre and many smaller chamber and jazz groups and choirs. Many of these have commented separately on the



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proposals and the detailed impact it will have on them. Fine music making has never been confined to Australia's large capital cities, and nor should its teaching be.

As a friend to the ANU and its School of Music, we must ask you to reconsider walking away from the function, conferred by your statute, of being a university that supports the practice to a high standard of music performance in our national capital. To persist with your proposal is to give in to the worst tendency of a university, that of withdrawing from the community it should be engaging with and participating in.

Yours sincerely

Paul Dugdale  
President