



The AUSTRALIAN BAND and ORCHESTRA DIRECTORS' ASSOCIATION

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Mr L Hartsuyker MP,
Chair
Inquiry into Teacher Education
Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training
House Of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Hartsuyker,

The Australian Band and Orchestra Directors Association (ABODA) is one Australia's premier in- service support organisation for music educators, instrumental music teachers and band and orchestra directors. ABODA pledges an ongoing commitment to the growth of music education and community music making throughout all areas of the country.

ABODA is an in-service organisation in Australia specifically for ensemble directors and communicates with other professional organisations both locally and internationally. The organisation operates in-service courses, professional development workshops and clinics on a regular basis, including annual summer conducting schools each January operated by its State Branches

National ABODA conducts a national conference (ANBOC) bi-annually with the various state conferences occurring every other year. Internationally renowned conductors and clinicians are used at these events. The Association attempts to fill the void left by the currently available music education courses.

Universities and other institutions offer music education courses, such as the Bachelor of Music or Bachelor of Music Education, based on traditional tertiary education regimes. The majority of such courses focus on instrumental performance or class-room music. It does very little towards the teaching of any particular instrument, with very little emphasis given to directing ensembles (conducting). Any University that does offer more detailed instrumental music programmes do so because the personal that implement such

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courses do so at a local level only and the decision to implement such course is not the official view of the University. In fact many Music Departments in the Universities are continually threatened by budget limitations and therefore these courses are run with minimal support and limited resources.

The New South Wales Education Department would have to have the worst record of support of instrumental music in Australia. They offer a small Unit called the Performing Arts Unit, which provides an elite Instrumental Music Programme only. The department also offers examiners for the HSC for students who wish to perform as part of the HSC. Ironically a student cannot enter University to study music unless they have achieved a certain level of competency on a musical instrument. One requirement of entry to the music courses is by audition. The NSW Education Department does not spend one cent on providing instrumental teachers or conductors for their many thousands of instrumentalists or ensembles in their schools. **Instrumental music teaching and conducting would have to be one of the very few professions where a qualification is not required to undertake either task .**

Many successful musical directors who achieve outstanding or at least above-average results with their ensembles have undertaken overseas study, have a significant natural ability and/or have been exposed to a mentoring environment involving persons or organisations such as ABODA with such skills. The result is that many people conducting or running musical ensembles have received little, if any, tuition in the conducting field from any Australian tertiary institution. Many of these directors are involved in school and community music programmes. It has been evident over the years that the success of a school music programmes, community bands and orchestras are directly a result of the skills of the conductor. A new conductor without the requisite skills or training has brought many a successful school band programme and to its knees. There is a great deal of variation in the standard of conductors, particularly in schools and the community and there is no set basic standard. The current tertiary qualifications provide little guidance to employers of conductors as to their ability to conduct ensembles or run music programmes.

Over recent years the attendance levels at the ABODA short workshops and conferences has diminished. Anecdotal research and discussion groups have offered some reasons for that situation. In brief, there is no compulsion on members to participate in the training being offered, they gain and maintain employment with their current qualifications, the success of the ensembles for which they are responsible has little affect on employment prospects other than in prestigious schools where fee paying parents expect only the best. Ultimately, members have other priorities on which they choose to spend their precious little non-working time. Other than the summer conducting courses, members receive little ongoing tuition, although professional developmental workshops are offered attendance rates do not make it financially viable for them to continue. It is important for ABODA to maintain its presence in the industry, to maintain the conducting profession at a suitable standard.

Under the Vocational Education Training programmes there are compilations of music industry competencies incorporating performance, management and technical presentation skills. A selection of music industry competencies has been formulated into courses offered by Registered Training Organisations such as TAFE and Music Colleges.

The current competencies only briefly cover the technical skills required for the conducting craft and are not formulated to come together in a course designed with an ensemble conducting qualification as an outcome. Competency based conducting courses will provide the opportunity for such directors to achieve a formal qualification which reflects the skills they have acquired whilst also removing the uncertainty for employers for an area of the arts where performance has traditionally been the measure of skills. The content and levels of courses will need to reflect the skills expected of conductors by various employers, from primary schools to professional music groups and be sufficiently broad to incorporate a wide range of musical ensembles (bands, small ensembles, orchestras, choirs etc.).

ABODA NSW has taken the opportunity to develop and market a 3 tiered program of competency based conducting courses that are accessible to potential students both financially and geographically, that provide students with tangible credit for music experience (and qualifications) gained at school or through life and that provide employers with criteria against which applicants for music industry employment positions may be assessed.

CONCLUSION

It is very evident that little has been done to educate and promote the qualification of the instrumental music teachers and ensemble directors. The token effort by Universities to offer 1 semester course on instrumental pedagogy or conducting is insufficient to equip students that choose that career path with an adequate knowledge and skill to be competent instrumental music teachers or ensemble directors/conductors.

There are some excellent skilled and experienced music teachers and conductors, not qualified and reached that level of competency through trial and error, overseas study or the few that have taken the opportunity to attend the conducting courses offered by ABODA throughout Australia. Consider how many more that are in the process of learning on the job and are currently not providing the students with the good habits that they need to be good musicians. It seems that many students are achieving those goals despite their teacher or Band Director. There is a huge amount of anecdotal evidence of poorly operated instrumental music programmes and ensembles. This can be directly related to the lack of suitable and adequate education and training in these areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Review outcomes of music courses (including content and output of current university courses, desirable conductor skills, employer requirements, career opportunities as conductors and instrumental music teachers).
2. Ascertain the skills & qualifications of members potentially involved in course delivery (insufficient university qualified staff to teach those courses)
3. Determine the levels of conducting skills required by the industry.
4. List of employers of conductors established and employer requirements matched with the levels of conducting courses.

5. In principle acceptance by Board of Studies/Education Departments of competency based music (in particular, ensemble music)- in schools.
6. Endorsement by the Board of Studies of/Education Departments music competencies and therefore contributing to student UAI scores.
7. School curriculum to include music industry competencies to reflect involvement of students in their school instrumental and band programmes so that skills are not left at school but taken into the community, which can then be seen as a career opportunity for those who may not yet be at the elite level but are able to offer a very worthwhile service to the community and be gainfully employed following additional studies through the VET programmes.



Frank Rugers
President NSW
For ABODA (AUST)