Evaluation of Regional Conservatorium music programs for school students
FINAL REPORT – Book 1
Prepared for the Association of New South Wales Regional Conservatoriums

8th April 2016

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15014/Conservatoriums/report book 1
“Music education is as important as numeracy and literacy”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive Summary</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report Structure</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1 Assessment of secondary data</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2: Qualitative fieldwork</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EVALUATION OF REGIONAL CONSERVATORIUM MUSIC PROGRAMS FOR SCHOOL STUDENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Acknowledgements

WRI would like to acknowledge the assistance of:

- Members of the project Steering Committee:
  - Graham Sattler, Vice-President Association of NSW Regional Conservatoriums
  - Stephen O’Connell, President, Association of NSW Regional Conservatoriums
  - Ray Gillies, Former Manager, Conservatoriums Specialist Programs Unit Learning and Leadership Directorate, NSW Department of Education and Communities
  - Ed Mafi, Conservatorium Officer, NSW Department of Education and Communities
  - Michael Cronk, Director of Public Schools, NSW Macquarie
  - Peter Nugent, recently retired Bathurst region Primary School Principal

- Heads of Agency and supporting staff of all regional Conservatoriums
- Participating schools and their staff

Above: Mitchell Young Voices
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In June 2015, the Western Research Institute (WRI) was engaged by the Association of New South Wales Regional Conservatoriums (the Association) to evaluate Conservatorium services to school age children, funded under the Regional Conservatorium Grants Program (RCPG). This evaluation follows on and draws from preliminary investigation into Conservatorium services undertaken by WRI earlier in 2015.

The evaluation was conducted over four phases:

- Phase 1 – Secondary Data analysis
- Phase 2 – Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis
- Phase 3 – Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis
- Phase 4 - Reporting

The Final Report updates the Interim Report, provided to the Association in November 2015, including information and analysis on Phase 3 quantitative surveys and final conclusions on the overall program evaluation. It also includes information on Phase 1 analysis that was incomplete at the time the Interim Report was completed.

The focus of the evaluation has been to answer three main questions:

1. Are regional Conservatoriums meeting the stated objectives of the RCPG guide?
2. What difference is the program making?
3. How well is the program operating?

Question 1 has been addressed in Phase 1 of the evaluation through an analysis of Conservatorium data, undertaken by the NSW Department of Education, based on Association reporting to the Department. This question is supported by information from the Association that speaks to the alignment between Association tuition and the learning and curriculum outcomes in the Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES) syllabus. In order to give a complete picture of Association performance against relevant benchmarks, a review was also undertaken of the Association’s performance against their 2010 Strategic Plan.

Questions 2 and 3 have been tested through Phase 2 and 3 of evaluation fieldwork. Results from this fieldwork have been analysed and reported under Phase 4 reporting.
PHASE 1 – SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS

Phase 1 activities included a desk analysis of Association performance against a number of different metrics:

- Achievement against key performance indicators (KPIs) set out in the RCGP program guidelines, undertaken by the Department
- Association program alignment with the BOSTES syllabus, evidenced by a letter from the Association
- Association achievements against their 2010 Strategic Plan, based on in-depth interviews with two senior members of the Association’s Executive Committee

RCGP program guideline KPIs

The Department undertook an analysis of Association reporting data over the 2009 – 2015 period to understand Association-wide performance. Achievement against RCGP KPIs has been mixed and KPIs have been categorised below according to whether they have achieved the RCGP target KPI or not.

**Achieved RCGP KPIs**

- KPI 5 The number of Aboriginal students participating in music activities
- KPI 6 The number of students from language backgrounds other than English participating in music activities
- KPI 7 The number of students with disability participating in music activities
- KPI 9 The number of gifted and talented music students learning at the Conservatorium
- KPI 12 The number of non-government schools in which the Conservatorium is working

**Below RCGP KPIs**

- KPI 1 The number of public schools in which Conservatoriums are working
- KPI 2 The number of public school students receiving individual music tuition
- KPI 3 The number of public school students participating in instrumental music and vocal/choral ensembles tutored
- KPI 4 The number of music workshops offered to public school students
- KPI 8 The number of remotely located public school students participating in the activities of the Conservatorium
- KPI 10 The number of early childhood students in music programs offered by the Conservatorium
- KPI 11 The number of music professional learning courses offered to public school teachers
- KPI 13 The number of non-government school students receiving individual/small group music tuition
- KPI 14 The number of non-government school students participating in instrumental music and vocal/choral ensembles tutored
- KPI 15 The number of adult community members receiving instrumental and or vocal/choral music tuition
In keeping with the BOSTES syllabus principles, regional conservatoriums promote and facilitate the development of knowledge and understanding of core musical activities through the study and experience of musical concepts, a wide range of repertoire and a sequential and planned process of teaching and learning.

**BOSTES alignment**

The Association provided feedback on the alignment of Association tuition with the BOSTES syllabus and associated outcomes. The Association advises that:

*NSW Regional Conservatoriums support the NSW Board of Studies Teaching & Educational Standards, Creative Arts, Music syllabus through aligned teaching of school-age children.*

In keeping with the BOSTES syllabus principles, regional conservatoriums promote and facilitate the development of knowledge and understanding of core musical activities through the study and experience of musical concepts, a wide range of repertoire and a sequential and planned process of teaching and learning.

The skills, values and attitudes involved in performing, organising sound and listening are identified by conservatorium teachers and experienced by students through the concepts of duration, pitch, dynamics, tone colour, and structure. While conservatorium teachers may vary their focus when commencing a program (in or out of the school environment) to best suit the student or cohort, the sequential and comprehensive curriculum-referenced approach is maintained as central to the Association of NSW Regional Conservatorium philosophy of effective teaching and learning, consistent with the BOSTES model.
Achievement against 2010 Strategic Plan

The evaluation also considered the degree to which Conservatorium programs are aligned to the strategies and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) outlined in the Association’s Strategic Plan. Given the recent adoption of a new strategic plan, the review focused on the extent to which the Association had succeeded in achieving its strategic goals over the 2010 – 2015 period.

Interviews with two senior members of the Association’s Executive Committee suggested that whilst elements of the Strategic Plan had been achieved, the Plan has not been entirely successful due to:

- areas of the Plan being overly prescriptive;
- specific strategic goals not being consistent with the requirements of Conservatoriums or the environment in which they operate; and
- a lack of active engagement in the Plan.

Despite these issues, interviews highlighted a positive picture of an Association that was developing and becoming more unified organisationally. This was evidenced by the formation of the 2015 Strategic Plan, which was argued to be more inclusive and realistic, and included mechanisms to support action across the network.

PHASE 2 – QUALITATIVE FIELDWORK

The focus of Phase 2 of the evaluation was to gather qualitative information about the school based and campus programs, specifically on the following evaluation questions:

- What difference is the program making - what are the outcomes of the program?
- How well is the program operating?

The fieldwork sought to hear from both Conservatorium and external stakeholders. Conservatorium stakeholders included the Head of Agency and a member of the teaching staff.

External stakeholders included:

- school Principals and school teachers;
- students involved in school based programs and their parents; and
- students involved in campus programs and their parents.

Four Conservatoriums were included in this phase of the evaluation:

- Mitchell Conservatorium
- South West Music
- New England Conservatorium of Music
- Clarence Valley Conservatorium
In some areas, Conservatoriums appear not to fully understand the sentiment of, or issues being experienced by parents and schools, as end users of Conservatorium services.

Conservatorium staff interviews

In this phase, interviews were conducted with:

- Four Heads of Agency; and
- Four members of Conservatorium teaching staff.

On the whole, findings from interviews with Conservatorium staff were generally supported by the findings of interviews with parents and school staff. Interestingly, however, in some areas, Conservatoriums appear not to fully understand the sentiment of, or issues being experienced by parents and schools, as end users of Conservatorium services.

Conservatorium reputation

Feedback from Conservatorium staff, schools and parents generally agreed that Conservatoriums had skilled teachers and also had some other quality elements, including appropriate staff vetting and some feedback mechanisms to manage issues. On the other hand, Conservatorium staff viewed their services as comprehensive, easy to use and that there was continuity to Conservatorium services. These elements were less apparent in feedback from schools and parents. It was also evident that Conservatorium staff were less aware of some of the negative reputational aspects found in school and parent interviews.

Student impacts

Conservatorium staff felt that their services had a variety of impacts on students. These included a variety of impacts on the musical ability, confidence, discipline, creativity and wellbeing of children enrolled in programs. There was further evidence of positive impacts on the ability of students to socialise and work in groups as well as other developmental benefits and financial benefits. These impacts were strongly supported by feedback from schools and parents.

School impacts

In general, Conservatorium staff believed that, if not for Conservatorium services, many schools would offer very limited musical education. Conservatorium staff felt that school impacts also included increased community engagement and the ability for schools to promote themselves in the community.

With a few notable exceptions, both of these findings were generally borne out by school feedback. However, Conservatorium staff appeared to be less aware
of the role that they were required to fill in each school or how their services fit into each school’s operations and priorities. Feedback from Conservatorium staff also highlighted that they do not appear to be aware of the operating issues being experienced by parents and schools using Conservatorium services.

Methods of teaching
Conservatorium staff discussed a range of effective and/or creative techniques through which they engage and teach students about music. There was discussion about teachers using group work, multimedia, videoconferencing and innovative group programs aimed at improving student wellbeing. It was also mentioned that Conservatorium staff were delivering professional development opportunities to school staff in methods of music education.

Qualitative feedback from parents and schools touched on some of these methods, with positive feedback for group teaching, the use of multimedia and some of the benefits of music programs in terms of professional development. Whilst none of the schools interviewed utilised videoconferencing to deliver music programs, the limited amount of parent feedback on the issue was not very supportive.

Operating issues
Conservatoriums spoke of issues in attracting and retaining appropriately qualified and suitable teachers. Viewing this issue from another angle, parent and teacher interviews highlighted some of the difficulties experienced with Conservatorium teachers, such as a lack of interpersonal or student engagement skills. This feedback appears to confirm the difficulties raised by Conservatoriums.

Finally, Conservatorium staff also discussed the issues that they face in finding an appropriate time and place in schools to undertake tuition. This particularly related to the provision of individual tuition. This issue was confirmed across parent and school interviews, with some school staff admitting that this issue could have been managed better by schools, and that it may have impacted on the operational success of providing individual tuition in schools.
School, parent and student interviews

In Phase 2, interviews were conducted with a total of:

- 12 School Principals or Assistant Principals (8 government primary schools, 2 Catholic schools, 2 independent primary / secondary schools);
- 25 members of schools’ teaching staff;
- 81 parents of children whose children attended Conservatorium programs at schools or on campus, including individual tuition, groups and classroom programs; and
- 26 students who attend Conservatorium programs at schools or on campus with the Mitchell Conservatorium.

A summary of findings follows.

Reputation

Conservatoriums generally have a very good reputation as providers of quality musical education. This is largely confirmed by schools, which view Conservatorium services and staff as a convenient, qualified, skilled and high quality. There are, however, some less positive views on certain aspects of Conservatorium services or reputation by some school staff. Parents also generally have quite positive views of Conservatoriums, although it was clear that parents who were more engaged in their children’s musical education, had stronger and more positive views of the reputation of their local Conservatorium.

It was also clear that Conservatorium staff were both a strength and a potential weakness in terms of their ability to impact the reputation of the Conservatorium. Many anecdotes highlighted the positive work and good reputation of current Conservatorium staff. There was evidence, however, of other (past and present) Conservatorium staff who were known for less positive aspects of their services, and this could potentially impact on the reputation of the Conservatorium.

Satisfaction

Overall, school staff, parents and students are quite satisfied with Conservatorium services. Satisfaction ratings showed high average levels of satisfaction for parents and schools staff and the majority of students interviewed indicated that they liked their Conservatorium program. Anecdotal evidence confirmed the satisfaction ratings provided during parent and school staff interviews.

Student impacts

Conservatorium classes and tuition have increased the musical competency of students across the competency spectrum. Students with very little music education or experience are learning foundational musical skills and concepts, whereas more advanced students are gaining experience, knowledge and a more sophisticated understanding of their instruments and elements of solo and group performance. Increases in student musical education have been reported in terms of increased musical competency, better quality and more public performances, increased music vocabulary, increased participation and engagement in music activities, and access to new musical opportunities.
Generally, there was little evidence to indicate that Conservatorium programs have significant impacts on students’ education in non-music subjects. Whilst there were some anecdotes that Conservatorium programs have had some positive non-music education impacts, these were balanced by some concerns that in-school Conservatorium tuition could take focus from core subjects, with potential negative impacts.

With regard to non-education impacts of Conservatorium programs, student participation was found to have a significant positive impact on a range of wellbeing factors. These include increased confidence and self-esteem, increased socialisation and positive relationships, increased focus, control and discipline, more positive emotional experiences, a greater sense of identity and belonging, positive behavioural impacts, and developmental benefits for students with disabilities.

Overall, qualitative feedback suggests that Conservatorium programs have strong positive impacts on school age students. These positive impacts are principally experienced in terms of music education impacts and non-education impacts. These impacts align with the cognitive, social and emotional wellbeing domains discussed in the Departments Wellbeing Framework.

Conservatorium programs were found to have significant impacts on the culture of a region, with evidence that Conservatoriums have assisted a flourishing musical scene in relatively remote regional towns and added to already vibrant musical communities elsewhere.

School and community impacts

In addition to the above impacts on students, Conservatorium programs were found to have impacts on the schools with which they were engaged and the wider community. Conservatorium programs have impacted on schools in a variety of ways. These include enhancing the music education offering within schools by augmenting the musical skills and knowledge of school staff, increasing the engagement of schools with music, enhancing school reputation, assisting school resilience and engaging student families in school activities, particularly in areas of disadvantage.

In addition, these programs have provided positive impacts for the wider communities within which they operate. Conservatorium programs were found to be giving back to these communities through public performances, often to disadvantaged, vulnerable or older parts of the community. A further finding was that these programs can have significant impacts on the culture of a region, with evidence that Conservatoriums have assisted a flourishing musical scene in relatively remote regional towns and added to already vibrant musical communities elsewhere.
Future operations would benefit significantly by improving communications, including better written material outlining Conservatorium services and policies, for schools and parents.

Operational issues

Whilst Conservatoriums have good reputations and demonstrated impacts for students, schools and communities, interviews identified a range of operational strengths and areas for improvement. Often, individual issues have been highlighted as both a strength and an area for improvement.

The quality of Conservatorium staff is one such issue. Where Conservatoriums manage to find the right staff, the operational and reputational benefits for the Conservatorium are very high. Where they have placed staff that do not fit with the students and organisations with which they are working, Conservatoriums can suffer operational issues and reputational damage.

Similarly, the importance of communications was highlighted. On balance Conservatoriums are managing communications reasonably well and some interviewees have not needed or wanted additional (or substantively different) communications. However, there have been numerous anecdotes of times when communications have not been managed well. Future operations would benefit significantly by improving communications, including better written material outlining Conservatorium services and policies, for schools and parents. Better communications (including written material) appear to be particularly crucial where clientele are new to Conservatorium services, although interviews highlight that even current users of Conservatorium services could benefit from greater clarity and understanding of those services.

Other operational strengths included the convenience of individual tuition in schools for parents and the level of professional development school teachers have gained by participating in Conservatorium run groups (including classes, choirs, orchestras, etc). Some areas for improvement in the operation of individual tuition in schools were noted as were financial issues (including the overall cost of programs and matters relating to scholarships).
PHASE 3 – QUANTITATIVE FIELDWORK

Whereas Phase 2 of the evaluation sought to collect and understand qualitative data on the impacts and operations of Conservatorium programs in schools and on campus, the focus of Phase 3 of the evaluation was to test these hypotheses across the wider network of regional Conservatoriums to arrive at more definitive conclusions. A total of 570 surveys were completed, made up of 360 parent surveys, 19 school staff surveys, 105 primary student surveys and 86 secondary student surveys.

Phase 3 surveys have tested themes and issues developed from Phase 2 qualitative interviews. The main broad themes tested across the parent, school and student survey cohorts were:

- Value of music education
- Reputation of Conservatoriums
- Satisfaction with Conservatorium services
- Operational strengths and areas for improvement
- Student impacts
- School impacts

Parent and school staff surveys provided questions relating to their views, interactions and observations on Conservatorium services. Student surveys sought to test the social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) of students, including their emotional, social and cognitive wellbeing, aligning with the Department of Education’s Wellbeing Framework.

Phase 3 of the evaluation sought to test the hypotheses derived from phase 2, across the wider network of regional Conservatoriums, through quantitative surveys of parents, school staff and students.

Below:
Monster Band Practice in the Charles Sturt University Auditorium
Parents and School Staff

Phase 3 fieldwork found that Conservatoriums have a strong reputation with school staff and parents, who rated reputation highly on a scale of 1 – 10, where 1 was very poor and 10 was very good.

Parents and schools also have high levels of satisfaction with Conservatorium services, again rating very highly on the same scale.

Right: Band performance on the lawns of the Bathurst Court House
Parents and school staff provided the words above when describing the reputation of their local Conservatorium. The size of the words shown relates to the frequency of their use by parents and school staff.
Primary students are experiencing strong positive emotional experiences when participating in Conservatorium programs.

Figure 4. Emotional experience of primary school students when participating in Conservatorium programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>86.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident</td>
<td>77.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proud</td>
<td>70.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>61.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calm</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nervous</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustrated</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worried</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angry</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Primary students are also reporting that participation in a Conservatorium program has helped them in other classes.

Figure 5. Impacts of Conservatorium programs in other education areas

- Have helped me in other school classes: 66.67%
- Haven’t made a difference to other school classes: 33.33%
- Have made it harder in other school classes: 0%

Right:
Macquarie Conservatorium Goolma Drummers
Secondary School Students

The majority of secondary students are making new friends through their Conservatorium program all or most of the time.

Secondary students are also reporting positive experiences in Conservatorium programs and music performances.

Left:
BlueScope Steel Youth Orchestra
Most significant impacts on students

Individual parent responses on the most significant impact on their child of Conservatorium tuition include:

- “A better understanding of the theory and more confidence”
- “A sense of being valued as a person and of development musically”
- “A deeper love of music and feeling inspired by her teacher’s modelling to improve her own playing”
- “Ability to read notation fluently”
- “More mature, happier”
- “Discipline and confidence”
- “Talking with adults has improved”
- “No significant change”
- “Not wanting to take lessons anymore”
- “They enjoy making good music in an ensemble, being part of a band/group”
- “They appear proud of their achievements in learning an instrument”
Evaluation conclusion

Overall, the Evaluation of Regional Music Conservatorium Programs for School Students has found that the Association’s network of regional Conservatoriums are delivering high quality music tuition services, both in schools and on Conservatorium campuses, extending into the community through quality student performances. Conservatoriums enjoy very strong reputations in their respective communities, attended by equally high levels of satisfaction from Conservatorium stakeholders, including students, parents and schools.

Conservatorium programs and tuition are having significant positive impacts on students in terms of their social and emotional wellbeing and their music education, with smaller positive impacts being experienced by students in other areas of their education. Further, Conservatorium programs are assisting schools to reach their educational goals and engage with their local communities.

Conservatoriums are seen as having significant operational strengths, although survey feedback has highlighted operational improvements that could assist Conservatoriums to provide better services. A good proportion of this feedback related to poor communications with parents and schools. Further work on improving communications and certain other operational aspects will see Conservatoriums more fully meeting the needs of their stakeholders. Similarly, the Association achievements against Regional Conservatorium Grants Program KPIs and the Association’s 2010 Strategic Plan highlight that there is room for improvement in reaching these goals.
## RECOMMENDATIONS

| **1. Extending Conservatorium Programs** | **Recommendation 1.1:** That Conservatoriums undertake more efforts to understand the demand for services – increasing services where possible  
**Recommendation 1.2:** That Conservatoriums engage with schools so they are aware of all the beneficial impacts of Conservatorium services  
**Recommendation 1.3:** That the Department work with Conservatoriums to best manage the communication of the benefits of Conservatorium services to schools  
**Recommendation 1.4:** That Conservatoriums place a priority focus on delivering group lessons in schools |
|---|---|
| In order to meet RCGP funding guideline KPIs, Conservatoriums are required to extend their services to include a greater number of students and schools receiving Conservatorium tuition services.  
**Recommendation 1.1:** That Conservatoriums undertake more efforts to understand the demand for services – increasing services where possible  
**Recommendation 1.2:** That Conservatoriums engage with schools so they are aware of all the beneficial impacts of Conservatorium services  
**Recommendation 1.3:** That the Department work with Conservatoriums to best manage the communication of the benefits of Conservatorium services to schools  
**Recommendation 1.4:** That Conservatoriums place a priority focus on delivering group lessons in schools. |
| **2. Resourcing** | **Recommendation 2.1:** That Conservatoriums and schools be better resourced to provide Conservatorium tuition to students in schools and on campus  
**Recommendation 2.2:** That the Association assist Conservatoriums to use videoconferencing as a teaching tool and managing technical issues |
| Conservatoriums are experiencing resourcing constraints in providing the current level of services to schools. Managing resourcing is crucial to the development of Conservatorium services in schools.  
**Recommendation 2.1:** That Conservatoriums and schools be better resourced to provide Conservatorium tuition to students in schools and on campus  
**Recommendation 2.2:** That the Association assist Conservatoriums to use videoconferencing as a teaching tool and managing technical issues. |

Above:  
Macquarie Conservatorium Brass Players
### 3. Strategic Alignment

The Association is a developing organisation that could benefit from greater cohesion and strategic alignment.

**Recommendation 3.1:** That Conservatorium strategic plans align with the Association Strategic Plan

### 4. Strategic Communications

Conservatoriums will need to manage communications and relationships better to build relationships and manage operations.

**Recommendation 4.1:** That the Association implement a range of strategic communication documents to be used by Conservatoriums to manage key relationships. These include:

- 4.1.1 Teaching Agreements (Teachers)
- 4.1.2 Service Charter (Conservatorium Administration)
- 4.1.3 School Plans (Schools)
- 4.1.4 Learning Plans (Parents and students)
- 4.1.5 Capturing complaints and feedback

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*Above: Peter and the Wolf Performance for Macquarie Conservatorium*
Introduction

In June 2015, the Western Research Institute (WRI) was engaged by the Association of New South Wales Regional Conservatoriums (the Association) to evaluate Conservatorium services to school age children, funded under the Regional Conservatorium Grants Program (RCPG). The evaluation followed on and drew from preliminary investigation into Conservatorium services undertaken by WRI earlier in the year.

The Evaluation of Conservatorium Music Programs for School Students was a phased evaluation with four phases:

- **Phase 1** – Secondary Data analysis, assessing achievement against key performance indicators (KPIs) set out in the RCGP program guidelines; Association achievements against their 2010 Strategic Plan; and Association program alignment with the BOSTES syllabus.
- **Phase 2** – Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis, to provide key insights into the outcomes of Conservatorium programs.
- **Phase 3** – Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis, to validate the qualitative findings across the 17 Regional Conservatoriums.
- **Phase 4** - Reporting.

The focus of the evaluation was to answer three main questions:

1. Are regional Conservatoriums meeting the stated objectives of the program guidelines?
2. What difference is the program making?
3. How well is the program operating?

Question 1 has been addressed in Phase 1 of the evaluation through an analysis of Conservatorium data, undertaken by the NSW Department of Education, based on Association reporting to the Department. This question is supported by information from the Association that speaks to the alignment between Association tuition and the learning and curriculum outcomes in the Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES) syllabus. In order to give a complete picture of Association performance against relevant benchmarks, a review was also undertaken of the Association’s performance against their 2010 Strategic Plan.

Questions 2 and 3 have been tested through Phase 2 and 3 of evaluation fieldwork. Results from this fieldwork have been analysed and reported under Phase 4 reporting.

A Steering Committee was formed to oversee the evaluation process and provide advice and guidance on issues such as evaluation methodology, ethical considerations and project management issues. The Steering Committee was comprised of:

- Two representatives from the Department (Regional Conservatorium Grants Program Manager and one other staff member);
- Two Regional Conservatorium Heads of Agency;
• An external stakeholder – a former Principal of a school currently involved in a Regional Conservatorium program; and
• Project Lead and senior researcher from WRI.

**Report structure**

The Final Report is comprised of two books. Book 1 includes the Executive Summary, evaluation introduction, methodology and detailed information on Phases 1 and 2 of the evaluation. Book 2 comprises of the methodology and detailed information on the Phase 3 quantitative surveys.

The report was structured into two books to account for presentation of the Interim Report provided to the Association in November 2015, including interim findings. Given that quantitative surveys were used to validate the findings of the Phase 2 analysis, it was agreed that Phase 3 should form a separate document so as to provide a clear and unambiguous set of findings that could be accessed easily.

**Book 1 is structured to:**

• Introduce the evaluation and provide the methodology to Phase 1 and 2
• Provide information on the Association’s achievement against a number performance metrics gathered through Phase 1 evaluation activities
• Provide an in-depth analysis of commentary regarding Association impacts and operations, gained from Phase 2 qualitative interviews

**Book 2 is structured to:**

• Outline the methodology utilised in Phase 3 surveys
• Provide an analysis of individual survey cohorts, including parents, school staff, primary students and secondary students
• Provide a summary conclusion on the key themes raised across evaluation surveys
• Include Interim Report conclusions in the Appendix so as to retain a record of interim conclusions and thoughts based on qualitative interviews
EVALUATION OF CONSERVATORIUM MUSIC PROGRAMS FOR SCHOOL STUDENTS

Methodology

Phase 1

The focus of Phase 1 of the evaluation was to assess existing reported data and plans to evaluate the degree to which Conservatorium programs:

- are meeting the requirements of the Regional Conservatorium Grants Program guidelines
- are aligning with Board of Studies Teaching and Education Standards (BOSTES) curriculum outcomes
- are aligned to the strategies and KPIs outlined in the Association’s strategic plan

These three activities have been assessed by different methods:

- Association performance against the KPIs in the RCGP funding Guidelines has been undertaken by the Department and was provided to WRI in graph form. This information has been replicated in this report with little commentary
- The alignment of Association programs with BOSTES curriculum outcomes has been evidenced by a letter from the Association, outlining its broad approach to tuition
- The assessment of the Association’s performance against its’ Strategic Plan was undertaken by WRI, based on interviews with two Heads of Agency to discuss how the Association had addressed each key result area within the Strategic Plan for 2010-2015

Phase 2

The focus of Phase 2 of the evaluation was to gather qualitative information about the school based and campus programs, specifically on the following evaluation questions:

- What difference is the program making - what are the outcomes of the program?
- How well is the program operating?

The fieldwork sought to hear from both Conservatorium and external stakeholders. Conservatorium stakeholders included the Head of Agency and a member of the teaching staff.

External stakeholders included:

- school Principals and school teachers;
- students involved in school based programs and their parents; and
- students involved in campus programs and their parents.

A mixed methodology was used to capture qualitative data from the different stakeholder groups. This is outlined in the table overleaf.
Sample selection for the phase

Four Conservatoriums were included in this phase of the evaluation. The selection of Conservatoriums for this phase aimed to ensure representation across:

- the coastal and inland geographic regions;
- Conservatorium sizes in terms of ETH (small, moderate and large); and
- the types of programs offered by Conservatoriums.

Schools were selected to participate based on the following process:

- A list of all schools associated with each Conservatorium was provided;
- A set of selection criteria was established to ensure representation of equity target groups and government / non-government categories was achieved;
- All schools fitting the criteria were contacted with the first three agreeing to participate included.

The Conservatoriums and associated schools that participated in Phase 2 are outlined in the table overleaf.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conservatorium</th>
<th>Schools</th>
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<td>Mitchell Conservatorium</td>
<td>ZigZag Public School, Lithgow (Government)</td>
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<td>Assumption School, Bathurst (Catholic)</td>
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<td>St Michael’s Primary School, Deniliquin (Catholic)</td>
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<tr>
<td>New England Conservatorium of Music</td>
<td>Newling Public School, Armidale (Government)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Presbyterian Ladies’ College, Armidale (Independent)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Armidale City Public School, Armidale (Government)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clarence Valley Conservatorium</td>
<td>Grafton Public School, Grafton (Government)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>West Lawn Public School, Grafton (Government)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Gillwinga Public School, Grafton (Government)</td>
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In this phase, in-depth interviews were conducted with a total of:
Four Heads of Agency;
Four members of Conservatorium teaching staff;
12 School Principals or Assistant Principals (8 government primary schools, 2 Catholic schools, 2 independent primary / secondary schools);
25 members of schools’ teaching staff;
81 parents of children whose children attended Conservatorium programs at schools or on campus, including individual tuition, groups and classroom programs; and
26 students who attend Conservatorium programs at schools or on campus with the Mitchell Conservatorium.
The sample achieved in terms of the participating schools reflects where the majority of Conservatorium work is currently taking place.

Fieldwork instruments
Fieldwork instruments were developed for each target cohort and were approved by the project steering committee. Apart from assessing satisfaction with the Conservatorium programs including areas for improvement, all instruments sought to capture information about the perceived and experienced impacts of Conservatorium programs on students’ music education and other education outcomes, as well as the non-education specific impacts of the programs.

For teacher and parent interviews, questions were framed in terms of impacts on students’ music education and other education outcomes, as well as the non-education specific impacts of the programs.
For student interviews, the guidelines were developed around the Department of Education’s Wellbeing Framework for Schools, which advises that wellbeing can be experienced through a number of domains:

- Cognitive
- Emotional
- Social
- Physical
- Spiritual

For the purpose of this evaluation task, WRI felt that the domains of cognitive, emotional and social wellbeing corresponded well to the impacts being assessed, specifically:

- Cognitive wellbeing could be tested through outcomes in music education and general education;
- Emotional wellbeing could be tested through non-education specific outcomes; and
- Social wellbeing could be tested through non-education specific outcomes.

Further advice on the development of the student interview guidelines and considerations for conducting these interviews was sought from academics working in the field.

A further partially quantitative survey instrument was developed for parents attending the focus groups or being interviewed individually. This survey sought to establish background for the discussion and to gather some early indicative data relating to the perceived importance of music education, satisfaction with the Conservatorium programs and most significant impacts.

**Analysis:**
The analysis process involved:

- Preliminary data processing conducted on-site at each location. This involved collating information from the in-depth interviews at schools and campuses to produce a set of information of a consistent format.
- A collaborative review of the data involving the Senior Research Officers (SROs) involved in collecting the data. This included content and thematic analysis of the data collected, categorised to answer the evaluation questions.
- A further round of analysis, identifying the key findings arising from information compiled for all sites.
- A high level review with WRI’s CEO.

**Project revision**
It should be noted that a project revision was undertaken in May/June 2015 in order to incorporate changes to the evaluation approach that would broaden the scope of the overall evaluation project. Interviews with a nominated group of Conservatoriums had been underway prior to the revision. The outcome of the revision was a change in scope of the project with an impact on the Conservatoriums and therefore schools included in Phase 2. Two Conservatoriums (Coffs Harbour Regional Conservatorium and the Murray Conservatorium of Music) were included in the original scope but removed from the revised scope of the project. Where appropriate, the analysis includes information gathered through interviews with stakeholders in the formerly participating Conservatoriums, though this is limited.
Phase 1 – Assessment of secondary data

Phase 1 of the evaluation was undertaken to assess existing reported data and plans to evaluate the degree to which Conservatorium programs:

- are meeting the requirements of the Regional Conservatorium Grants Program guidelines;
- are aligning with Board of Studies Teaching and Education Standards (BOSTES) curriculum outcomes; and
- are aligned to the strategies and KPIs outlined in the Association’s strategic plan.

Phase 1 activities included a desk analysis of Association performance against a number of different metrics:

- Achievement against key performance indicators (KPIs) set out in the RCGP program guidelines, undertaken by the Department
- Association program alignment with the BOSTES syllabus, evidenced by a letter from the Association
- Association achievements against their 2010 Strategic Plan, based on in-depth interviews with two senior members of the Association’s Executive Committee

RCGP program guideline KPIs

The Department undertook an analysis of Association performance against the 15 key performance indicators under the RCGP program guidelines and the change in Equivalent Teaching Hours (ETH) for the different streams of music tuition provided by Conservatoriums. This information has been provided by the Department in graph form. Achievement against RCGP KPIs has been mixed and KPIs have been categorised below according to whether they have achieved the RCGP target KPI or not. Graph data for KPIs and ETH has been included in Appendix 1.

Achieved RCGP KPIs

- KPI 5 The number of Aboriginal students participating in music activities
- KPI 6 The number of students from language backgrounds other than English participating in music activities
- KPI 7 The number of students with disability participating in music activities
- KPI 9 The number of gifted and talented music students learning at the Conservatorium
- KPI 12 The number of non-government schools in which the Conservatorium is working
Below RCGP KPIs

- KPI 1 The number of public schools in which Conservatoriums are working
- KPI 2 The number of public school students receiving individual music tuition
- KPI 3 The number of public school students participating in instrumental music and vocal/choral ensembles tutored
- KPI 4 The number of music workshops offered to public school students
- KPI 8 The number of remotely located public school students participating in the activities of the Conservatorium
- KPI 10 The number of early childhood students in music programs offered by the Conservatorium
- KPI 11 The number of music professional learning courses offered to public school teachers
- KPI 13 The number of non-government school students receiving individual/small group music tuition
- KPI 14 The number of non-government school students participating in instrumental music and vocal/choral ensembles tutored
- KPI 15 The number of adult community members receiving instrumental and or vocal/choral music tuition

BOSTES alignment

The Association provided feedback on the alignment of Association tuition with the BOSTES syllabus and associated outcomes. The Association advises that:

- NSW Regional Conservatoriums support the NSW Board of Studies Teaching & Educational Standards, Creative Arts, Music syllabus though aligned teaching of school-age children.

In keeping with the BOSTES syllabus principles, regional conservatoriums promote and facilitate the development of knowledge and understanding of core musical activities through the study and experience of musical concepts, a wide range of repertoire and a sequential and planned process of teaching and learning.

The skills, values and attitudes involved in performing, organising sound and listening are identified by conservatorium teachers and experienced by students through the concepts of duration, pitch, dynamics, tone colour, and structure. While conservatorium teachers may vary their focus when commencing a program (in or out of the school environment) to best suit the student or cohort, the sequential and comprehensive curriculum-referenced approach is maintained as central to the Association of NSW Regional Conservatorium philosophy of effective teaching and learning, consistent with the BOSTES model.

A copy of the Association’s letter addressing BOSTES curriculum alignment can be viewed in Appendix 2.

Strategic Plan review

The Association undertakes strategic planning to identify priorities and set organisational goals. Over recent years, strategic planning has roughly fallen into two periods. Between 2010 and 2015, the Association has operated under the 2010, Strategic Plan for the future direction of the Association of NSW Regional Conservatoriums (ANSWRC). The Association has recently adopted the Strategic Plan 2015 – 2018 for operations over this coming period.

Given the recent adoption of a new strategic plan, it was agreed that a review would be undertaken to assess the extent to which the Association succeeded in achieving its strategic goals over the 2010 – 2015 period.
The 2010 Strategic Plan provided an outline of the Association’s Key Result Areas (KRAs) for the provision of high-quality music education, training and performance programs throughout Regional and Rural NSW. The document set a framework of development for the Association over a 3-year period and outlined the strategies required to achieve these goals. The Strategic Plan provided six KRAs, with a number of detailed outcomes provided against each KRA.

Interviews were undertaken with two senior members of the Association’s Executive Committee, Stephen O’Connell (ANSWRC President) and Hamish Tait (ANSWRC Vice President), to understand the Association’s performance against the 2010 Strategic Plan. The following analysis has been undertaken on the basis of these two interviews, with some of the insights gained through other fieldwork interviews.

Overall, these interviews suggested that whilst elements of the Strategic Plan had been achieved, the Plan has not been entirely successful. A range of issues were put forward illustrating the problems encountered in achieving strategic goals:

- To some extent, Executive Committee interviews highlighted differing opinions on what goals were achieved or how well they were achieved. Some strategic goals had obviously been fulfilled, whereas other areas had mixed success.
- The level of success in achieving strategic goals may potentially speak to the quality of the 2010 Strategic Plan, as much as the Association’s efforts to achieve these goals. Interviews suggested that the Strategic Plan was too prescriptive and that specific strategic goals were found to be inconsistent with the requirements of Conservatoriums or the environment in which they operate. This resulted in a number of strategic goals remaining incomplete.
- The view was put forward that many Conservatoriums were not actively engaged in meeting strategic goals over this period. Indeed, it was remarked that ‘most people would not know that the Association had a strategic plan’ and that few Conservatoriums had integrated it into their plans. This was seen as a result of a Plan that did not engage the Association network very well and a low ‘ownership’ of the plan by the network.
- Where certain strategic goals were achieved, the achievement was considered to be incidental to the Strategic Plan. That is, goals were met simply because they aligned with the needs, goals and day-to-day activities of Conservatoriums.
- Despite these issues, interviews highlighted a positive picture of an Association that was developing and becoming more unified organisationally. It was remarked that despite the deficiencies of the 2010 Strategic Plan, the Association had grown organisationally and had become more of a real association, rather than a group of disparate Conservatoriums. This was evidenced by the formation of the 2015 Strategic Plan, which was argued to be more inclusive and realistic.
### Key Result Area

**KRA1 Advocacy and Representation - So that NSW Regional Conservatoriums are acknowledged and valued as key providers of quality music education & performance in New South Wales**

Interviews suggest that this KRA was largely achieved, even if specific objectives under this KRA were not fully met. The KRA was mostly seen to be achieved through committee level advocacy, individual achievements, the work of separate Conservatoriums and the gradual recognition over time of the value and work of NSW Regional Conservatoriums.

Interviews illustrated the view that the Association had worked itself into a position of credibility as a peak body for regional Conservatoriums and built strong relationships with artistic bodies, universities and major touring organisations.

**KRA2 Financial Resourcing - So that NSW Regional Conservatoriums are appropriately funded**

Whilst specific objectives appear to be largely achieved, the success of some of the approaches has been questioned. Association feedback highlights continued funding issues.

**KRA3 Industry Standards - So that NSW Regional Conservatoriums operate to an agreed standard**

Regional Conservatoriums have current training requirements in place relating to Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment, and accreditation with the Music Teachers’ Association. However, agreed standards for music teachers remain an ‘elusive target’ for the Association, particularly given the unregulated nature of the music industry. It was suggested in interviews that this KRA was not achieved and the imposition of onerous standards in this area would serve to make Conservatoriums less cost competitive.

**KRA4 Equity and Access - So that NSW Regional Conservatoriums are used to benefit the greatest number of students in rural and regional New South Wales**

Whilst specific objectives listed under this KRA have largely been met, it is unclear whether regional Conservatoriums have greatly expanded the number of students, the geographical reach or the number of equity target groups being serviced during this period. Greater emphasis on equity target groups, in particular, did not appear to be a focus for the Association. It was also noted that, in the absence of new funding, it is unfeasible to develop new regional Conservatoriums.

One of the key tools highlighted to achieve greater geographical coverage, video conferencing technology, appears to have limited acceptance in the day to day operations of many Conservatoriums. Whilst Association Committee members endorse video conferencing tools as a useful method for reaching a wider student cohort, individual Conservatoriums have reported limited uptake. A number of issues have been raised in the use of video conferencing,
including time delays, internet speeds and an inability to provide appropriate tuition.

KRA5 Governance and Human Resources - So that NSW Regional Conservatoriums are effectively managed and receive appropriate governance and human resource support from ANSWRC

Governance and human resources appears to be an area where the Association has broadly achieved strategic goals. The Association appears to have been proactive in developing appropriate policies and assisting individual Conservatoriums with practical and useful governance and human resources advice.

For example, with the introduction of Fair Work Australia, the workload relating to employment issues has increased dramatically. The Association has worked with Conservatoriums to access legal advice and provide assistance with child protection and legal compliance issues.

An interesting observation was made that as the operating environment has changed to include greater emphasis on governance and industrial relations issues, so too had the role of Heads of Agencies (HOAs). Whereas previously HOAs were artistic directors, the role had now become that of a CEO. This has potential implications for the future skill sets required for this role.

KRA6 Music Education, Training and Performance - So that NSW Regional Conservatoriums continue to improve the quality of the education, training and performance programs offered to their communities

Again, whilst some specific objectives have been achieved, there is little evidence that the Association has managed a coordinated effort to improve the quality of the education, training and performance programs offered to their communities. This is not to say, however, that individual Conservatoriums have not managed to do so. Notably, there appears to be a focus on curriculum development going forward.
Phase 2 – Qualitative fieldwork

The focus of Phase 2 of the evaluation was to gather qualitative information about school based and campus programs, specifically on the following evaluation questions:

- What difference is the program making - what are the outcomes of the program?
- How well is the program operating?

Fieldwork sought to hear from both Conservatorium and external stakeholders. Conservatorium stakeholders included the Head of Agency and a member of the teaching staff.

External stakeholders included:

- school Principals and school teachers;
- students involved in school based programs and their parents; and
- students involved in campus programs and their parents.

The following section provides summary information on the operations and context of each of the Conservatoriums involved in Phase 2 and a thematic analysis of the feedback received in qualitative interviews. Qualitative interviews have been discussed in terms of feedback from interviews with Conservatorium staff and feedback from interviews with schools, parents and students.

Context

Mitchell Conservatorium

The Mitchell Conservatorium is situated in Bathurst and services local and outlying districts, including Lithgow, Forbes, Sofala and O’Connell, amongst others. Mitchell is a Tier 1 Conservatorium under the Regional Conservatorium Grants Program – Funding Guidelines.

Based on interviews undertaken in Phase 2 fieldwork, Mitchell Conservatorium services a range of schools, from relatively low resourced, low socio-economic status up to and including well-funded private schools with high-level music programs. Services offered in schools participating in Phase 2 interviews included individual tuition, classroom programs, groups and ensembles. Mitchell also offers a full range of campus music programs and tuition.

Interviews with campus parents highlighted an expectation and focus on advanced level musical tuition and performance at the Conservatorium. In line with parent expectations, Mitchell Conservatorium appears to focus on more elite levels of musicianship, with traditional classical instruments, including choral, wind instruments, strings and other orchestral instruments. Higher level musical outcomes were also found in some school programs, particularly given the emphasis on music in local private schools. Public school programs were observed to be more orientated to foundational level music opportunities and experience.

Interestingly, school parent participation in the Phase 2 fieldwork was very limited when compared with other regions, suggesting low parent engagement with the Conservatorium. This did not appear to be related to the
willingness of individual schools to facilitate or encourage parent participation in interviews. Of note, the lowest parent responses in the Mitchell region schools occurred in private schools.

**South West Music**
South West Music is based in Deniliquin and services a wide geographic area, including Berrigan, Hay, Balranald and Moulamein. South West Music is a Tier 5 Conservatorium under the Regional Conservatorium Grants Program – Funding Guidelines.

Based on interviews undertaken in Phase 2 fieldwork, South West Music school services are predominantly focussed in medium to low socioeconomic schools, broadly representing the school populations in the area. Services offered in schools participating in Phase 2 interviews were principally focussed on individual instrumental tuition. South West Music campus music programs and tuition appeared to be focussed on individual tuition, rock band and choral group programs.

Tuition and programs appeared to be targeted towards modern styles of music and related musical instruments. In general, parent groups highlighted a preference for musical engagement, performances and social interaction, rather than for more advanced levels of musicianship. This focus appeared to be reflected in the level of teaching, the types of instruments and musical styles taught by South West Music. This gave rise to an inclusive feel to the services provided by South West Music, and was very much in the local spirit of community inclusiveness apparent in Deniliquin.

Interviews highlighted a widely supported view of a profound social change underway in Deniliquin, with music emerging over the last 10 years (approximately) as a relatively new and widely accepted part of the local culture; particularly amongst school students. This was often discussed in terms of ‘cultural change’. This view was repeated in interviews across schools and different parent groups. Along with one particularly influential high school music teacher, South West Music was given substantial credit for assisting and developing this cultural change.

**New England Conservatorium of Music (NECOM)**
NECOM is based in Armidale in the New England region. NECOM provides services across a number of towns in the New England region, focussing on Armidale, Inverell and Walcha. NECOM is a Tier 1 Conservatorium under the Regional Conservatorium Grants Program – Funding Guidelines.

NECOM is currently providing tuition and running music programs across a broad range of schools with differing socioeconomic backgrounds. Schools range from well-resourced private schools with significant internal music programs, to local public schools, including remote, low socioeconomic schools with high Aboriginal enrolments and significant social problems. School programs cater to each of these school types with classroom, group and individual tuition.

The Armidale community is notable for its strong musical culture and high levels of engagement in music, and a very high engagement and respect for their local Conservatorium, NECOM. Indeed, NECOM’s reputation and strength appears to stem from the strength of the local musical culture and community, independent music teachers and classically focussed community music organisations. These include the University and a variety of local orchestras, choirs and groups.

The strong local musical culture has influenced the focus of NECOM towards advanced levels of musicianship, very much focussed on classical music and related instruments and a very strong focus on choral music. Campus
parents interviewed not only were often heavily involved in music themselves, but had children who were engaged in the Conservatorium in multiple programs and at very high levels of musical ability. The advanced and classical focus of the Conservatorium was seen to have resulted in the exclusion of more modern types of music and related instruments.

A further, noticeable aspect of NECOM services was their strong engagement in multiple partnerships with musical organisations and schools. Indeed, NECOM appeared to be engaged with local and external musical organisations, teachers, parents and students at multiple points. NECOM had managed to form strong partnerships with the schools included in Phase 2 interviews, local orchestras and choirs, had strong connections to national musical bodies such as the Gondwana Choirs, and was engaged with students (often the same students) in schools, on campus, and in performances and eisteddfods.

Clarence Valley Conservatorium
The Clarence Valley Conservatorium, based in Grafton, services a range of schools locally and in surrounding districts, Maclean, Yamba, Wooli and Nymboida. The Clarence Valley Conservatorium is a Tier 4 Conservatorium under the Regional Conservatorium Grants Program – Funding Guidelines.

Based on interviews undertaken in Phase 2 fieldwork, Clarence Valley Conservatorium school services are predominantly focussed in medium to low socioeconomic schools - again, a reflection on schools in the area. Services offered in these schools included individual instrumental tuition, groups, bands and ensembles and whole of class music programs (mainly choirs, but also some instrumental classes).

Two of the schools interviewed appeared to be heavily dependent on Conservatorium services. Music programs at schools appeared to be focused on exposing children to music and engaging students. Interviews indicated that this was quite successful, and also provided opportunities to engage parents in the school community.

In the third school, the Conservatorium provided individual and small group tuition services, which supported a strong, school music program. In this case, interview feedback indicated that Conservatorium tuition provided children with the skills to participate in the school program and that these tuition services underpinned the success of the program.

Interviews with parents of children engaged in Conservatorium programs through their school suggested that Clarence Valley Conservatorium had a lower profile in the Grafton community, relative to other case study areas. By comparison, interviews with campus parents suggested that the Conservatorium has a reputation for quality teaching, and that there is positive word-of-mouth promotion in the community.

The appearance that the Conservatorium has taken more of a background role in the community may be related to several contextual factors:

- Grafton emerged from the interviews as a community where music was not a particularly high priority. For example, the local Eisteddfod has been cancelled over a number of years.
- The high proportion of schools with low socioeconomic status – the Conservatorium is evidently engaging large numbers of students through primary school programs which are either focused on group delivery, or heavily subsidised.
- The presence of several personalities in the community who were willing and able to drive community-based music events and groups, especially for the primary school age group.
It was also noted through interviews that there is a lack of programs available for students to continue with music education as they progressed from primary to secondary school. That is, while secondary students could enrol in campus programs, there was no continuity of programs through schools.

**Conservatorium interviews**

WRI undertook qualitative phone interviews with two staff members from the Mitchell, NECOM, Clarence Valley and South West Music Conservatoriums. Those interviewed included the Head of Agency (HOA) or other senior staff member and one Conservatorium teacher.

The interviews probed Conservatorium staff on their views over a range of issues relating to operations and impacts of their programs. These included:

- the regions in which the Conservatorium operate and the range of services offered of each Conservatorium;
- the number and type of schools with which each Conservatorium is engaged in their region;
- the impacts of Conservatorium programs;
- matters relating to improving and extending access to Conservatorium programs.

In addition to the information gathered through phone interviews, Conservatorium staff were also asked to share any additional data or information that may provide relevant background to the operations, quality or impacts of Conservatorium school programs. A variety of data was received in relation to this request, varying between Conservatoriums.

A thematic analysis of this data highlighted a range of relevant issues and information. This information has been organised below into the following categories:

- Anecdotal evidence, which suggest that Conservatoriums are perceived to have certain qualities
- The impacts on students of Conservatorium programs
- The impacts on School and community of Conservatorium Programs
- Successful or innovative teaching methods utilised by Conservatoriums
- Operating issues

**Conservatorium qualities**

Discussion with Conservatorium staff provided a good deal of anecdotal evidence, reflections and views on the nature of Conservatorium programs and how they work in schools. Interviews highlighted Conservatorium views that their services are popular with schools because they are perceived to have a number of positive values and qualities. On this basis, it seems appropriate to group interview feedback in terms of the qualities and values ascribed to Conservatoriums. The qualities highlighted are discussed below.

**Comprehensive**

Feedback suggests that Conservatoriums provide a comprehensive range of services in schools. Programs include group and individual instrument tuition, instrumental ensembles, choir, drum groups, bands and music therapy. Conservatoriums are capable of providing curriculum support and teaching to a range of target equity groups,
including children with a severe disability or behavioural issues. It was commonly viewed that the comprehensive nature of Conservatorium services made it an attractive supplier of school programs.

Quality
Interviews strongly expressed the view that Conservatoriums provided high quality school music programs. Quality was discussed in terms of a number of different markers.

Teacher qualifications featured strongly in these discussions. Based on interviews undertaken, it appears that all Conservatorium teachers providing school programs have attained a high level of musicianship and are experienced musical performers. Furthermore, it appears that academic qualifications in music and education are also common. In contrast, interviews highlighted that schools very often had minimal musical experience or appropriately qualified music teachers.

Quality was seen to be upheld by quality control measures implemented by Conservatoriums, including communication with schools to see what was working, appropriate vetting of teaching staff (including working with children checks) and the development of school programs in line with Board of Studies curriculum guidelines.

Finally, Conservatoriums felt that quality was also ensured by the professionalism of their services. Professionalism was discussed in terms of Conservatorium staff being competent, reliable and persistent. There was also discussion of personal presentation as further evidence of professionalism, which Conservatoriums felt were a strong point of their operations.

Continuity
A common theme in interviews across a number of regions was that Conservatoriums were able to offer continuity in terms of the provision of services. Interviews identified schools across a number of regions that had engaged a Conservatorium after a previous provider had ceased operating at their schools. This occurred for a range of reasons including, performance and presentation issues, personality issues, retirement and the closure of certain provider organisations.

In contrast, Conservatoriums are well placed to continue to provide services in almost all circumstances. Interviews illustrated that Conservatoriums have greater access to well qualified staff and a wide professional network. This was seen to allow Conservatoriums to provide new teachers, new programs and continue the provision of services in cases of emergency or if schools wished to change or replace a specific program or Conservatorium teacher.

In addition, to the service provision aspect of this feedback, it was also highlighted that Conservatoriums offered continuity to students that wished to continue their music education outside of school. In these circumstances, Conservatoriums are able to assist students to reach very high levels of musical ability.

Ease of use
A significant part of the interview feedback related to the ease of use for schools engaging Conservatoriums to provide music programs. An important aspect of Conservatorium services was considered to be the ability for schools to engage with Conservatoriums and not have to deal with a variety of time consuming issues relating to the administration of the program.

The administrative issues handled by Conservatoriums include:

- Billing and associated management and risks
- Administration
EVALUATION OF CONSERVATORIUM MUSIC PROGRAMS FOR SCHOOL STUDENTS

- Curriculum development
- Staff development
- Screening appropriate staff
- Performance and other human resource issues

Student impacts
Conserveratorium staff interviews also examined the impact of Conserveratorium school music programs on students, schools and their communities. The feedback received from interviewees identified a diverse range of observed impacts.

Personal development
In interviews with Conserveratorium staff, a range of impacts were observed in the students involved in Conserveratorium programs. Conserveratorium teachers found that students enrolled in programs experienced an increase in musical ability, confidence, discipline and creativity. Furthermore, it was felt that student wellbeing was improved. There was further evidence of positive impacts on a student’s ability to socialise and work in groups.

Some interesting evidence was provided by one Conserveratorium teacher that spoke to the impacts on student wellbeing of Conserveratorium programs. The impacts were evidenced through survey data gathered for a specific Conserveratorium music project designed to assist the transition from primary to secondary school, through self-expression in a rap music format. A survey of students who had participated in this project showed that the students’ positive feelings about themselves improved on all but one of 16 different wellbeing metrics (the remaining metric showed no change).

Creativity
Further anecdotal evidence showed high levels of creativity when children were asked to engage in programs utilising multimedia to produce a song and an accompanying film clip. The children who took part in the program were reported to be highly engaged, enthusiastic, confident and were found to have developed a number of new skills. In another anecdote from the same school, children requested and completed a project to write a song about the tragedy of the missing Malaysian Airlines plane.

Developmental
Conserveratorium interviews also provided evidence of the developmental benefits of their music programs. In one instance, a child being taught piano through a school music program was reported by their paediatrician to have significantly improved fine motor skills as a result of Conserveratorium lessons. Other examples of developmental impacts have been observed in students with Autism and speech and hearing difficulties.

Financial
A final observed impact is that, for those students wishing to enrol in private schools, the development of musical talent through Conserveratorium programs can provide opportunities to access scholarships to these schools, with up to a 75% reduction in fees.

School and community impacts
A further area of discussion in Conserveratorium staff interviews was the impact of Conserveratorium programs on schools and the communities that Conserveratoriums operate in. These interviews highlighted the following impacts.
ASSOCIATION OF NSW REGIONAL CONSERVATORIUMS

Sole provider of music programs
Conservatoriums interviewed as part of the evaluation are regionally based, servicing communities with varying degrees of remoteness. Those Conservatoriums servicing more remote regions can have significant impacts on the children, schools and communities in their areas by the simple fact that there are often no other individuals or organisations offering music tuition services, particularly in schools. Without Conservatoriums, many of these children would not have a chance to be involved in music.

Promotion
One interviewee held the view that children, schools and communities were positively impacted by the ability of music and music performance to promote those involved. In this view, students performing as part of the Conservatorium program studies were able to promote themselves within the school; schools showcasing their musical students were able to promote the school to the community; and engagement between students, schools and communities was increased as a result.

Community engagement
Greater community engagement was seen as a significant impact arising from Conservatorium music programs. Firstly, Conservatorium music programs created the opportunity for public performances and this facilitated greater engagement between students, schools and the community.

An anecdote from one Conservatorium illustrated the links that Conservatorium programs can make between students, schools and communities. In this case, students who had participated in Conservatorium programs performed in the local art-deco theatre to an audience of 950 people. The event raised money for the community and was considered a huge success. Other public performances, such as eisteddfods and shopping centre performances also draw large crowds and allow the community to engage with local schools.

Another anecdote highlighted increased community engagement through fundraising, with a Conservatorium teacher beginning a music program in a small, remote school. Due to a lack of school resources, this teacher took the initiative to raise money from the local community for the purchase of instruments for the school. As time and experience on an instrument is the pathway to musical proficiency, the potential impact of providing these instruments is very high.

A second impact has been more engagement between local organisations through fund raising activities for schools. Interviews have illustrated a number of instances where music programs have been funded by local charitable organisations. These organisations include the Country Women’s Association, Rotary and the Lions Club. These instances are another example of community involvement in Conservatorium school music programs.

Methods of teaching
Conservatorium staff interviews also highlighted that Conservatorium teachers are using effective and creative techniques to engage students in music, as well as passing on knowledge to school teachers about music education methods.

Groups
Many interviews have highlighted the success of using group projects to engage students in music. It was viewed that group music projects build students’ confidence and encourage teamwork. It was also suggested that students working with one-another maintained higher levels of motivation in the class room; particularly so for primary school students.

Group ensembles were highlighted in one interview as one of the most rewarding school music activities available. This was supported by anecdotes from one particular interviewee who described children working together,
showing remarkable creativity and engagement with each other, and incorporating current affairs into their music compositions. Satisfaction and engagement levels for these groups were reported to be very high.

Another positive feature of group tuition was that it kept music more affordable, as the cost of the teacher was spread amongst many students.

**Multimedia**

An approach utilising multimedia equipment to record and produce songs and film clips was found to be an interesting, engaging and rewarding method by which to teach music to children ranging from primary to secondary school. This particular interviewee discussed how children’s lives now revolve around technology and that the inclusion of technology in their activities was a key to securing their engagement.

By utilising this technology to produce film clips, a range of positive outcomes were experienced. Firstly, the project allowed all students to be involved, but also allowed each individual to have a ‘chance to shine’ in front of the camera and microphone. Secondly, filming and recording these students provided a running record of their development. Third, it provided students the ability to improvise and compose music. The final positive impact was that the finalised film clips were then made available to parents, allowing them to share their children’s creativity and progress.

**Videoconferencing**

Videoconferencing was an interesting issue in interviews, in so far as there was a stark contrast in its uptake by Conservatoriums. Some Conservatoriums were sceptical about its capacity to be used as teaching tool, whereas other Conservatoriums were strong supporters. Others had attempted to use videoconferencing to mixed success.

The view was expressed by one interviewee that individual music tuition was difficult to undertake via videoconferencing, as instrumental techniques could not be described adequately and must be demonstrated in person. The same interviewee mentioned that there had been some success in videoconferencing harp lessons from a teacher in Melbourne. Another issue raised was that videoconferencing was difficult to use in any ‘live’ performance as the transmission delay made it too difficult.

One particular Conservatorium, however, advised that they made extensive use of the technology, and had done so for some time. This Conservatorium covers a large and remote region, which raises the necessity of using the technology.

This interview provided an interesting anecdote, illustrating the use of the technology to incorporate a remote school into a combined school performance. In this example, a remote school band had been included in a performance with other schools, utilising videoconferencing. This combined performance would have been impossible without the videoconferencing technology.

It appears that there is strong potential that other Conservatoriums could utilise this medium to a greater extent in the future. It would appear that increased usage of videoconferencing could be highly beneficial for Conservatoriums, given the concerns raised over the cost of travel and the difficulties in getting Conservatorium staff to remote schools.

**Managing school transition**

Another interesting and successful Conservatorium program discussed was one developed to encourage students to express themselves and learn about music performance through ‘rap’ music. The course was designed and
implemented by a Conservatorium teacher, with the aim to teach kids rhythmic singing styles, improve English and grammar and teach students to work in teams. The key focus of the program however, was to build confidence in students and enable them to express their fears about transitioning to secondary school.

The course was anecdotally reported to have been very successful in achieving its goals. These reports were evidenced by a pre-program and post-program survey of the children involved in the project, across a range of metrics, which gauged how each child felt about themselves and their connection to their peers and communities.

The survey asked an array of questions, including:

- I am interested in learning new skills
- I can create rap songs
- I am interested in music and dance
- I am looking forward to going to high school
- I think dancing and learning to create rap songs will give me confidence
- I feel confident performing in front of an audience
- I feel connected to my community

Comparison of pre and post program surveys found that students involved in the program responded with higher survey results against every metric in the survey, except for one metric where no change was recorded.

Professional development
One Conservatorium responded to WRI’s request for information on internal reviews, providing data collected from a survey of schools in their region. One finding from the survey data was that Principals had expressed an interest in Conservatoriums undertaking professional development workshops with school teachers. Principals expressed the opinion that they would often rather train their internal teachers to deliver musical programs, rather than have an outside music specialist come to the school. In this way, the school would build capacity in the delivery of music programs and retain these skills.

Whilst this could be viewed as a negative for Conservatoriums, as it could reduce the need for their services in these schools, there is a potential upside. Schools that have a preference for delivering music programs internally are less likely to engage an outside provider. Providing professional development training, whilst a limited service, is likely to enhance the relationship with the school and could lead to other opportunities in the future. The potential alternative is that these schools will neither undertake professional development nor engage an outside music program provider.

Operating issues
Conservatorium staff were also asked what aspects of Conservatorium services to school aged children were working well and what aspects of these operations could be improved upon. Two common operational improvements were raised in interviews.

Qualified teachers
The lack of properly qualified teachers was a very common theme hindering Conservatoriums. Finding teachers with appropriate music qualifications is difficult, whilst sourcing teachers that are capable of teaching in school situations can be even more problematic.
Interviewees suggested that this was somewhat linked to the issue of Conservatoriums being unable to provide attractive employment packages. However, lower population and remoteness was another influencing factor in employing appropriately qualified musicians.

**In-school accommodation**

Another issue raised in a number of interviews was that, once Conservatoriums were engaged to provide music programs, there was a constant battle to find an appropriate time and place to provide these services. Busy school rosters, other extra-curricular activities and a lack of space meant that Conservatorium teachers were often required to shift their schedules to fit in with other events, and often had to teach their programs in uncomfortable or inappropriate surroundings.
School, Parent and Student interviews

WRI undertook qualitative interviews with school staff, parents and students to understand views on Conservatorium services to school age children in schools and at Conservatorium campuses. The interviews focused on understanding:

- The importance of music education;
- Conservatorium reputation;
- Satisfaction with Conservatorium programs;
- Student impacts of Conservatorium programs;
- School and community impacts of Conservatorium programs;
- Operational issues, including strengths and areas for improvement; and
- Information on Conservatorium services to target equity groups.

Given the subjective nature of understanding opinions relating to Conservatorium services, students, parents and school staff were asked to rate their satisfaction with Conservatorium services. This was undertaken to provide an indicative understanding of how Conservatorium services are viewed overall, whilst accounting for any negative issues that may be raised through interviews.

Students were asked to provide their feedback on their satisfaction with Conservatorium programs through a simple Like, Unsure, Dislike game. Parents and school staff were asked to rate their satisfaction with Conservatorium programs on a scale of 0-10 (0 being unsatisfied and 10 being completely satisfied). The average scores included in the relevant sections below are indicative only.

Importance of music education

When questioned about the importance of music education for students, there was generally strong agreement that music provided significant benefits for students. Principals and teachers interviewed in this phase all agreed to the importance of music in education, although to vary degrees. Supportive views were expressed, such as music is a “valuable skill and experience”, that music is as “important as numeracy and literacy” and that “music is a critical part of a child’s education and development”.

However, the more compelling support for the importance of music came from parents, who strongly agreed that music education is important for children. When asked to rate the importance of musical education, parents provided an average rating of 9.4 out of 10.

Most of the qualitative feedback on the importance of music education related to aspects of personal development and wellbeing for students learning music. This included:

- Enjoyment: Interestingly, the idea that music education should be undertaken for the purpose of enjoyment was only mentioned a few times throughout interviews. The general discussion, however, was clear in that parents believed music was enjoyable for their children.
- Identity: a common theme in parent feedback was that music provided certain children with an identity and that this allowed them to fit into a group. It was often suggested that this identity was particularly important to kids who were not sporty.
Discipline: many parents felt that the discipline required to practice regularly, learn music, turn up to practices and performances, care for instruments and consistently undertake other music related routines developed a sense of discipline. This was seen as an important skill for the future.

Developmental: music tuition, particularly for younger children, was seen to have multiple positive developmental benefits. This was often discussed in terms of brain development, creativity, problem solving, listening, learning and other factors.

Coping: Parents often discussed music as offering a way for their children to deal with stress and anxieties. This included dealing with stress from external factors, such as school, as well as internal anxieties.

Self-expression: The idea that music was a form of self-expression was raised a number of times.

Social development: many comments from parents related to the idea that music assisted children to develop socially. This was expressed in terms of children developing friendships through music, a way to meet new people and people from different backgrounds, developing networks of like children, developing a shared identity based on playing music, and camaraderie, amongst other factors.

Working in groups: whilst similar to the ideas expressed relating to social development, parent feedback also suggested that music provided particular skills for working in groups. This included skills like teamwork, cooperation, listening to and recognition of others.

Skills: Many parent responses revolved around the skills that children develop from learning music. Some of this feedback related purely to the increase in technical music proficiency. In other instances it related to the skills that would provide children with future careers in music. One interesting anecdote was provided where an older child, who had been involved in a Conservatorium choir, used her singing skills whilst on work experience during her teaching degree to calm a class of rowdy children.

Well rounded education: Consistent feedback suggested that music education provided a well-rounded education to children and produced well-rounded individuals who could appreciate creative pursuits and had a wider knowledge of the world.

Relating to family: Whilst this was not a common response, parent interviews at a number of schools highlighted that music education had provided another avenue through which children could relate to their family. One parent talked of music as a way to “tighten family bonds” by playing music together, whereas a couple of fathers interviewed used music as a way of having meaningful time with their sons. For one father, this was felt to be a particularly important way for him to relate to his autistic son.

Other reasons were provided for the importance of music education. The two most common of these were:

Providing opportunities: A very common response was that music education provided opportunities for children. Interestingly, this phrase was used in a variety of ways. Some parents discussed opportunities in terms of providing children with an array of activities to expose them to new things, allowing them to see what they like. Other parents related it to providing disadvantaged kids with access to activities that they may not receive otherwise. Finally, there were opportunities provided to their children through playing music, such as access to master classes, concerts and the ability to join various groups, orchestras or choirs.

Convenience: Discussed directly in terms of providing individual tuition in schools, many parents appreciated the convenience of having these classes provided at schools. A common response from parents throughout interviews highlighted busy parent and child schedules, with out of school hours often filled with multiple activities.
Reputation

Overall, Conservatoriums were observed to have positive reputations amongst Principals and teachers. The reputation of Conservatoriums varied between towns, with NECOM standing out as having a very strong positive reputation. Other Conservatoriums appeared to have a positive reputation, although this was less pronounced.

Terms such as “supportive”, “skilled”, “good relationship”, “good organisation and communication” and “very professional and polished” were used to describe Conservatoriums. In some instances, individuals talked of the Conservatorium’s access to wider music networks, whereas others discussed the “regularity” of Conservatorium services.

Feedback from Principals and teachers provided a consistent view that Conservatorium teachers are skilled musicians and have expertise that schools don’t have. There was also a sense that Conservatorium teachers were of a certain standard, with appropriate vetting being undertaken by Conservatoriums.

Despite the general positive reputation of Conservatoriums, operational issues and problems have impacted on perceptions of Conservatoriums. For some Conservatoriums there was mixed feedback about the ability of teachers to impart their knowledge and to relate to students. There were instances where individual teachers had reputations as either very good at working with children or quite poor. There was also feedback to suggest that Conservatorium teaching staff were not always considered organised and/or reliable and that Conservatoriums had some organisational issues.

At one school, where operational issues had concerned the Principal, there was a feeling that the local Conservatorium was not seen to be a strong partner. In another school, whilst Conservatorium teachers were praised, the local Conservatorium was noted for a lack of presence and profile. These views, however, were not widespread.

Parent interviews also highlighted a positive view of the reputation of Conservatoriums. Many parent groups expressed support for their local Conservatorium and some expressed how lucky their town was to have a Conservatorium to provide programs to local children. A strong theme was that the reputation of Conservatoriums was strongly influenced by individual teachers. Where teachers had good reputations, this flowed through to the Conservatorium and vice versa.

There were some differences in perceived reputation reported by the parents of students receiving music programs in school compared to parents of students attending Conservatorium campuses.

Whilst some school parents had expectations or views on the reputation of Conservatoriums, in many cases, reputation did not appear to be a driving factor as to why they had enrolled their child in a Conservatorium program at school. Instead, school parents often talked of the perceived benefits of music education and the convenience of having these lessons provided in school, given other constraints on their time. Having made a decision to enrol their children in music tuition at school, in many cases, the local Conservatorium was the only music provider at the school.

In contrast to school parents, parents of campus students appeared to be considerably more engaged with their children’s musical education and expressed stronger views on the perceived reputation of their local

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11 Obviously, this does not apply to parents of children in classroom programs, as these are compulsory.
Conservatorium. Interestingly, a common response from campus parents was that they received word of mouth recommendations for Conservatoriums. Services provided at Conservatoriums were described by these parents, using terms such as “high quality”, “skilled” and “advanced”. One of these parents described their children learning music at the local Conservatorium as akin to “learning a language in the country it is spoken in”.

Parent views of Conservatorium reputation was more pronounced in Armidale, where the Conservatorium was widely known for its excellence and its ties to the local music community and the music industry outside of the region. An interesting aspect of the reputation of NECOM was that it was seen as a central part of Armidale’s music community and was involved with other popular musical organisations. The Conservatorium was described as a music “hub”, part of a “network” and a “music place”.

Satisfaction

Students
Students were asked to provide their feedback on their satisfaction with Conservatorium programs through a simple Like, Unsure, Dislike game. Of the 26 students interviewed, 17 liked their Conservatorium lessons and the remaining 9 were unsure. In percentage terms, this is approximately 65 percent like to 35 percent unsure.

Whilst students were not directly asked to discuss their satisfaction with Conservatorium programs, generally, the feedback from students was that they enjoyed their lessons. Students generally described more ‘likes’ than ‘dislikes’ when asked about their Conservatorium class/es, and highlighted positive aspects of these lessons.

Parents
As expressed throughout this report, parents were generally, very satisfied with Conservatorium services. When asked to fill out a satisfaction rating sheet based on their experience with a Conservatorium, the average score for parent satisfaction was 8.9 out of 10. The average score for parent views of child satisfaction with Conservatorium programs was 8.8.

Principals and Teachers
Principals and teachers involved in the organisation of the Conservatorium programs in schools were also asked to rate their satisfaction with the programs and to provide their views of student satisfaction with these programs. The average satisfaction rating provided by Principals was 8.4 out of 10. The average score for Principal views of student satisfaction with Conservatorium programs was 8.1 out of 10.

Principals provided some interesting feedback when asked to discuss the reason for their satisfaction rating. Many expressed their satisfaction with Conservatorium services as a whole, with feedback including that Conservatorium programs had “met all of my expectations”, that the Conservatorium has been “working very hard to improve the relationship”, and that their service was “pretty close to 10, which is outstanding”. One Principal emphasised that the school had a good partnership with the local Conservatorium, stating “Everything we’ve asked for, they’ve provided or done in partnership with us”.

There were, however, two schools that appeared less satisfied with the services provided by their local Conservatorium. One Principal found the current configuration of Conservatorium services to be “too disruptive to school processes”. This Principal could see the potential benefit of Conservatorium services, but was generally not happy with the way it was working currently.
The other school that expressed lower levels of satisfaction with Conservatorium services discussed how the Conservatorium provided little in the way of administrative assistance or musical leadership at the school or in the wider community. Despite this view, Conservatorium services were seen as essential to the running of the school’s strong band program.

Parents were asked to write down the most significant impact of Conservatorium programs on their children. The information gathered through this activity provides an interesting overview of the kinds of responses received in this section.

Parent responses included a wide range of very positive feedback, including:

- Confidence in speaking and performing
- Instrument proficiency
- Discipline
- Music appreciation
- Enjoyment
- Participation and performance
- Enthusiasm for music
- Personal development
- Excitement
- Reduced anxiety
- Friendships
- Social interaction
- Improved maths and reading
- The smile on his face
- Improved self-esteem
- Life skills

The most common responses related to:

- Increased music proficiency and performance
- Positive emotional experiences
- Confidence and self-esteem
- Life skills
- Socialisation and positive relationships

Whilst feedback was overwhelmingly positive, there were some reports of students discontinuing Conservatorium lessons for various reasons, including a lack of enjoyment. One parent also reported that their child had become withdrawn and angry due to their participation in a Conservatorium program.
Student impacts
Interviews with students, parents and school staff sought to gauge the impacts of Conservatorium programs on students. In parent and school staff interviews this was measured in terms of:

- music education impacts – to what extent have Conservatorium programs impacted on students’ proficiency and engagement in music;
- non-music education impacts – to what extent have these programs impacted on students’ education in subjects, other than music; and
- non-education impacts – to what extent have these programs impacted students outside of education, including behaviourally and socially.

As explained in the methodology, interviews with students were structured to investigate student impacts in terms of the Department of Education Wellbeing Framework for Schools. WRI felt that the domains of cognitive, emotional and social wellbeing corresponded well to the impacts being assessed, specifically:

- Cognitive wellbeing could be tested through outcomes in music education and general education;
- Emotional wellbeing could be tested through non-education specific outcomes; and
- Social wellbeing could be tested through non-education specific outcomes.

The following discussion of the student impacts will address elements of each domain as appropriate.

Music education impacts
Improvements in musical education and engagement were highlighted in a number of interesting ways in interviews with Principals, teachers and parents.

Increase in musical competency
The first and most obvious impact of Conservatorium music programs has been an increase in the musical competency of students. Whilst one teacher noted that any child receiving tuition will improve their musical knowledge and skills, feedback from interviewees established that Conservatorium programs had achieved this.

An increase in musical competency has also been observed by parents and teachers at both ends of the competency spectrum. For students with little musical education, Conservatorium programs have been observed to provide foundational musical knowledge, including increased motor skills, rhythm, beat recognition and understanding notes and pitch. A Principal of a school with a low socioeconomic profile, running a Conservatorium classroom program, gauged the increase in musical proficiency of children as an increase from one out of ten, to six or seven out of ten over the two terms that they had worked with a Conservatorium teacher.

For students with more advanced musical education, Conservatorium programs are adding to their musical competency, often by means of individual tuition. This has been illustrated by increases in students’ technical abilities on their chosen instruments, music composition skills and music reading. Other observations have been that students in Conservatorium programs have noticeably progressed in the ability to play in tune and in time as groups.

An interesting observation from one school music teacher was that one particular student had moved from a non-Conservatorium saxophone teacher to a Conservatorium saxophone teacher and had blossomed musically. The change in teacher had turned this student from a “quiet, shy kid into a very confident and expressive player”, who
was now leading the band section. The teacher being interviewed held the view that, generally, Conservatorium music teachers had greater ‘musical maturity’ than other external music teachers providing tuition at the school.

Overall, parents and school staff across all interview cohorts almost universally agreed that Conservatorium programs were increasing musical ability. One parent summed this up, saying “we wouldn’t keep paying otherwise”.

“learning to express themselves through music”
“they’ve learnt the language”
“Seeing music coming home that is progressively getting more complex”
“teaching himself other songs by using the Internet”
“concentrates for longer periods”
“teaching himself guitar and ukulele”
“relished the challenge of learning to read”

Public performances
A further way that Conservatorium programs have impacted on students’ musical education has been observed in the number and quality of public performances in which these children have been involved. Interview feedback highlighted that students involved in Conservatorium programs appear to be getting substantially more opportunities to perform. Performance opportunities highlighted in interviews have ranged from low key performances at school assemblies, nursing homes, local eisteddfods and other small events, through to performances with local, state and national orchestras, choirs and other groups. These performance opportunities have included performances in high status events, including the Sydney Opera House, and in televised concerts.

It was also suggested that the general increase in music proficiency, provided by Conservatorium tuition, was resulting in better quality public performances. One school that used individual Conservatorium tuition at school, to provide the skills base for its school band, advised that band performance would not be as good, if not for the Conservatorium tuition. Similarly, a Principal of a small public school that utilises a Conservatorium class program thought that the program taught kids the “elements of a quality performance”.

Interviews at one public school provided an interesting anecdote on the improved performances. This school had won an eisteddfod choir section, competing against a strong field of performers, and had attributed this to their Conservatorium choir leader. This victory was found to be more compelling, given that the choir included “disengaged kids and kids with little musical skill”.

Music vocabulary
An interesting observation made by a number of parents was that being involved in a Conservatorium program gave children new experiences to talk about. One respondent described this as developing a widened vocabulary and ability to vocalise and discuss music and musical activities. These students were able to participate in musical activities, then explain to others what they were doing. It was also observed that these students were also able to ask insightful questions about music. In other responses, students have been observed discussing music they have heard on the radio and discussing instruments and beats used in that music.
Participation and engagement
A clear response from both parent and school interviews was that Conservatorium music programs were driving student participation and active engagement in music activities. The number of kids getting involved with music has increased, including mandatory participation in some class or group programs, but also in many voluntary situations. This includes more students starting to learn an instrument and more students joining organised groups and bands. There have also been many reports of students increasing informal musical activities, such as student bands and performances at informal music nights.

There have been numerous reports of students being involved in spontaneous musical activities, such as an anecdote relating to a student, who had recently been involved in a class music drum group, who was found ‘playing drums’ on upturned buckets in the sandpit during a number of recesses. Other anecdotes highlighted an increase in students singing, drumming on things and listening to more music outside of music classes.

Other observations by parents highlighted their children’s enthusiasm for music. One parent advised that their child does not need to be nagged to practice or attend lessons. Other parents described their children picking up new instruments, attempting to teach themselves and transposing music between instruments. There were also a number of parents who observed their children utilising Internet resources to teach themselves new music.

New musical opportunities
A final way that Conservatorium programs were found to impact on students’ music education was that they expose students to a range of new musical styles and experiences. Music programs discussed in interviews included many different styles of music, including African drumming, choral groups, jazz bands, recorder groups, rock bands and string groups, just to name a few. Conservatoriums also provide access to touring professional music groups, masterclasses and specialist instrument tuition. The range of opportunities for students was perhaps best illustrated by the story of an eight year old boy that was given the opportunity to play as part of a 95 piece orchestra.

Other education impacts
Parents, Principals and teachers had mixed opinions as to whether Conservatorium music programs assisted students in education areas, other than music. But for a few examples, it was found that most of these respondents could not identify direct links between Conservatorium services and progress in other areas of education.

Impacts on other education
Many parents referred to ‘studies’ that linked musical learning with enhanced learning capacities. However, when asked for practical examples of how Conservatorium music programs had assisted their children to improve in other academic areas, there was little evidence that this was occurring.

Several parents indicated that although they assumed their children’s general education was benefiting from participation in a music program, they could not identify specific benefits. On the other hand, one parent suggested that her daughter had “neuroscientifically skyrocketed” since being involved in Conservatorium music programs.

Some parents suggested that it was too difficult to discern the benefits to non-music education because Conservatorium music programs had been a feature of their child’s education since before the children started formal schooling. Other parents thought that it was simply too early to see academic changes resulting from Conservatorium music lessons.
There were, however, some parents who identified ways in which their children had improved in other educational areas. Of this group, many parents identified that their children had shown improvements in the area of maths. A further interesting example was provided whereby a child had developed an improved understanding of history through learning about historical aspects of the music he was learning and had increased his language skills through music terminology and singing in German. In fact, a number of parents and teachers referred to learning music being like learning a language.

Literacy and reading was another area of improvement cited by a small number of parents and teachers. One parent elaborated that her child had developed an enjoyment of reading since participating in the Conservatorium music program, attributing this change to growing perseverance and learning to take time to absorb words associated with music.

Generally, however, Principals and teachers were less inclined to draw a link between Conservatorium music programs and improved academic outcomes. Whilst these respondents were generally positive about the role of music education, the benefits that they identified were focussed on how Conservatorium programs impacted children’s general approach to school, or skills that aided the learning process. These included improvements to team or group work, including greater patience in taking turns, rather than particular academic skills development.

A couple of other relevant observations were made by school staff. One Principal noted that children learning aspects of music, such as timing, counting and beats, helped to “develop the numerical side of their thinking”. One music teacher also suggested that students who learn through the Conservatorium are usually above average academically.

*Classroom management*

Several Principals and teachers noted that participating in Conservatorium programs contributed to a better learning environment in the classroom. One Principal referred to music as helping to “contribute to a more harmonious learning environment”. A number of teachers reported that students who participate in music programs have a calmer approach to the rest of their lessons, and tend to be more willing to “have a go” in the classroom.

Moreover, participation in concerts and performances is treated by some schools as a privilege which is lost for poor behaviour. Several teachers and Principals reported that students miss out on concerts/performances if they “get in strife”, and that they don’t like missing out. This encourages students to monitor their behaviour, especially when events are coming up. One Principal also reported that music involvement tends to lead to better attendance at school more generally and commented that “these things lead to better learning”.
Negative education impacts
One potential issue identified in the qualitative interviews and focus groups was where children might be repeatedly missing out on the same lessons to receive private or small group tuition. Only a few parents were concerned by this, most suggesting that it had not become an issue for their child. This appeared to be due, in most cases, to efforts on the part of schools and tutors to ensure that children did not miss the same subject repeatedly. Some parents had opted for classes outside of school time to avoid this becoming an issue. Interestingly, one parent who conceded that in-school Conservatorium music lessons might have a negative impact on other academic areas was prepared to let her child “slip a bit academically ... to keep him engaged”.

Non-education impacts
Conservatorium programs were found to have a large impact on students’ feelings, behaviour and relationships with others. A number of positive impacts were prominent in interview feedback.

Confidence and self-esteem
When asked about the non-education impacts of Conservatorium programs, the leading response provided by Principals, teachers and parents was that these programs increased the confidence and self-esteem of the students. One teacher shared her experience that one of her students, who did not participate much in class, generally came back from Conservatorium music classes a little more willing to join in other class activities. This was reinforced in another school, where less academic kids were seen to ‘blossom’ as part of their participation in a Conservatorium program. In another anecdote, an Aboriginal parent described the impact of a Conservatorium program on his daughter, who had progressed from being a shy child, to becoming school Vice-Captain, making speeches and performing a welcome to country at a school event.

A further, interesting example of increased confidence was provided by one parent. This parent attributed a level of personal growth in their child to the Conservatorium music program, indicating that it had provided a personal ‘voice’, strength and resilience to combat bullying. It is of note that other, unrelated feedback also suggested that Conservatorium programs provided kids with resilience to bullying, including a personal anecdote provided in student interviews.

“self-discipline, concentration, ability to stick at something difficult”
“improved memory”
“blitzed speech for school captain”
“less likely to look for a quick fix – see reward for putting effort”
“Music makes them fearless”
“Learn how to break down a task to succeed”
“seeing patterns in everything now”
“has transferred well into dancing”
Socialisation and positive relationships
A clear outcome of Conservatorium programs was reported to be increased socialisation and positive relationships for students. Students were seen to be making new friends, often with students from different groups or schools with whom they would not normally mix. This included mixing with students of different ages and backgrounds, and mixing of students with a disability and students without a disability.

Indeed, there was substantial feedback that participation in Conservatorium programs had improved tolerance and understanding between students. Across multiple interviews parents and teachers used a range of words, including tolerance, encouragement, empathy, nurturing and respect, to describe changes that they had noticed in their children and students. These descriptions were reinforced by personal observations made by one individual who thought that students that were known to be ‘different’ were able to find a place to fit in at the local Conservatorium.

There was also evidence that students often had positive relationships with their Conservatorium teachers. Numerous interviews with parents, teachers and students highlighted that Conservatorium teachers were often seen as mentors by the students. Many of these teachers were commended in interviews for their ability to engage and relate with their students in a positive fashion.

Finally, interviews also noted that an impact of Conservatorium programs was an increase in teamwork activities and skills. In these comments parents and teachers discussed how music ensembles and groups required students to be mindful, to engage and to not “push to be up front”. Interestingly, more than one parent described musical ensembles/groups as teamwork “but not as a competitive sport”.

Positive emotional experiences
Positive emotional experiences were also put forward as an impact of Conservatorium music programs. Parents discussed a range of positive emotional experiences their children had experienced in these programs, including happiness, enjoyment, pride and relaxation.

Life skills
A clear and strong response from parents was that children gained skills that could be applied to other aspects of their life, through their participation in Conservatorium programs. Parents discussed the practical skills that kids needed to develop to attend classes, care for instruments, play music in groups, practice, perform in front of audiences and arrive on time and prepared. Parents felt that this instilled in their children, a sense of responsibility, discipline, focus, maturity, the ability to handle pressure and other generic life skills.

Parents, teachers and Principals also identified a range of general skills gained through Conservatorium music programs which could be applied in a range of subject areas, including: memory, concentration, pattern recognition, problem solving, time management, taking responsibility and commitment. A notable theme from many parents and some teachers was an increased ability to persist with difficult tasks. This theme was demonstrated by comments such as “the ability to ... keep going when something is hard”; “patience to stick at something” and “learn how to break down a task to succeed”. Parents noted that many of these skills contribute to getting assignments done on time and academic achievement in general.

Identity and belonging
Parents also found that one of the impacts of Conservatorium programs was that it assisted children to develop a sense of identity and belonging to a group. This was discussed in a few ways. One parent highlighted that carrying musical instruments was a very visual cue that their child was musical. Another parent talked of their child’s
musical talent as a way of “owning” a talent that builds their identity, whereas a further parent talked of their child’s long-term engagement in music, describing it simply as “part of who she is”.

**Behavioural**

Conservatorium programs were attributed with having positive behavioural impacts on students. Firstly, it was noted that students are generally well behaved in music classes as they are engaged and generally find them enjoyable. This may be impacted by findings, by a number of teachers, that Conservatorium music programs have a calming influence on children.

Better behaviour in Conservatorium music classes was illustrated by one Principal who compared the behaviour of a class of students in a Conservatorium program with the same class’ behaviour in another school program to teach kids about gardening and cooking. The Principal described students’ behaviour in the gardening and cooking program as “terrible”, and noted that there were no comparable behavioural problems when kids were engaged in the Conservatorium music program.

Another Principal, whose school focussed on whole-of-child education and wellbeing, partly attributed a low level of behavioural problems at the school to the Conservatorium music program. That is, by supporting student wellbeing, Conservatorium music programs helped to control poor behaviour. Of the 300 children at the school, the Principal advised that there were only (approximately) five children that required monitoring for poor behaviour.

**Developmental**

Interviews also illustrated the impact of Conservatorium music programs on aspects of some children’s physical/intellectual development. One teacher discussed how children with hearing and speech impairments had increased their participation in classes, and their understanding of classes, as a result of their involvement in a Conservatorium program. In another parent interview, it was found that a child with quite a profound learning disability had increased in vocalisation through attending a Conservatorium run music therapy program.
A moving anecdote from another parent provided evidence that Conservatorium programs can assist children with a disability to develop skills and improve wellbeing. A foster parent of two Aboriginal boys with serious developmental issues explained that her eldest foster son has gained a sense of worth, purpose, self and achievement through music. These boys had come from a highly unstable background, having attended ten schools in two years. The elder boy in particular has found that music provides him with an activity that he can do, which doesn’t frustrate him and that he is happy to keep working away at. This parent has praised their school and its’ Principal for providing these children with their best school experience and placed significant emphasis on the school’s music program, including the Conservatorium run class.

“becoming a little more disciplined”
“another medium for the development of life skills”
“have to be fairly independent – don’t get that involved – just take them to and from performances”
“Pushes them through their comfort zone”
“an area he is good at and owns”
“outlet to focus him”

Student perspective

As discussed in the methodology, the student impacts of Conservatorium music programs correlate with certain domains within the Department of Education’s Wellbeing Framework. The student perspective on the impacts of these programs is considered in terms of the Cognitive, Social and Emotional domains.

It should be noted that interviews undertaken with students included a range of ages, including students from years 3 – 12. On this basis, qualitative feedback is skewed towards older students, given their greater ability to discuss and articulate their experiences, abilities and preferences. In these circumstances, it is important not to understate the significance of general findings, as younger students mostly expressed themselves in general terms.

Cognitive

Students generally agreed that they were getting better at music. A range of views were put forward, with some students seeing that they had improved a lot, whereas others had only seen gradual improvement. Two children involved in a school class program thought they had not improved.

Where students were more able to discuss their improvements, they thought they had improved at playing their instrument, in sight reading music notation, in their ability to learn new material rapidly, playing more technical pieces, and had become better at technical aspects of their instrument/voice.

When asked whether they found Conservatorium music lessons easy or hard, again, students provided a mixed response. Some students, who felt that classes were easy, discussed that this could make the classes boring. Whilst some students expressed that classes were sometimes hard, it was not felt that classes were too hard and a number of students also discussed that challenging classes were better.

Other relevant observations included that Conservatorium teachers (particularly in the context of individual tuition) were often able to choose new music that was suitably challenging for their students. Also, it was observed
that, given the differing levels of student musical competency, it was harder for teachers to achieve the right level of musical difficulty for all students in group and classroom situations.

With regard to the ability of students to deal with challenges in class, students were asked how they felt when they had completed a challenging music class task. Students indicated that in these circumstances they had felt proud, relieved, happy, good, excited and more confident.

**Social**

Students were asked a number of questions about playing music with other students and performing for friends, family and in public, as part of their Conservatorium music program. Students were also asked to provide feedback on their likes and dislike regarding their Conservatorium program.

Student feedback highlighted that these programs increased their opportunities for social interaction, had resulted in positive relationships, and that the students enjoyed the social aspects of these programs. Social interactions mainly related to public performances and increased engagement and interactions with other students through music.

Almost all of the students interviewed had performed in public, with many of these performances directly relating to their participation in Conservatorium music programs. Performances had taken place in a wide range of venues and circumstances, including school assemblies, local eisteddfods and events, band tours, televised community performances, Education Week, Carols by Candlelight and performances at local nursing homes.

Many of the students interviewed also performed at home for their family and expressed enjoyment in doing so. For one school, students had been able to share their performance at a local event with family members as they had been featured on local television.

With regard to the social aspect of participating in a Conservatorium program, students liked playing music in groups and the chance that these groups provided to them to meet and engage with other students. Student feedback also highlighted that performing in groups could be challenging, particularly in groups with different levels of musical ability, but were generally rewarding and enjoyable.

Where students were more able to discuss their experiences, it was found that students made friends with new people through Conservatorium workshops and groups. One student discussed how he liked to meet other people ‘with the same passion’ in Conservatorium groups and that this ‘creates a good learning environment’. Another student discussed how he had established a whole new group of friends through their connection to a Conservatorium campus program.

**Emotional**

Students were asked a number of questions about how music programs made them feel and the way they felt about certain aspects of these classes. Students provided feedback that suggests that, generally, music classes prompted positive emotions. However, there were instances where responses were less positive, or in one case, quite negative.

Positive responses found that Conservatorium music classes were associated with words like fun and happy, and included positive emotions relating to working with groups and teachers. In some cases, students highlighted their pleasure in playing and listening to certain styles of music. Many of these students look forward to their music classes. In contrast, some students discussed occasional frustration when learning, and anxiousness and nerves
ahead of performances and exams. However, no students indicated that these emotions were impacting them unduly.

In terms of negative emotions, only one student discussed negative emotional impacts from their participation in a Conservatorium music program. In the context of a compulsory Conservatorium run music class (ukulele group), this student provided consistently negative responses to evaluation questions including that he “dreaded” music classes. Furthermore, he described attending music classes as “like sitting in a doctors surgery, waiting”. Whilst some of this feedback appeared to be provided in jest, parent and teacher feedback had highlighted this student’s general dislike of the music class. It was, however, advised that whilst the student continued to dislike the music program and did not participate, the program was not impacting negatively on the student.

Interestingly, there was considerable feedback around the emotional experience of performing. A common response was that performances often made students nervous and some of the younger students found performances a little “scary”, particularly solo performances. Feelings of pride and achievement were also associated with these performances.

Older students (particularly campus students) also discussed very positive, and quite sophisticated, feelings about performing. It was clear that these students love playing music and enjoy sharing that passion with others. One student discussed how performing allows you to “show your dedication, passion and achievements”, adding that he “lives for it”. Another student talked about “doing what you love and showing what you can do”.

A number of other interesting examples of strong positive emotional responses to music and Conservatorium programs were provided. One student discussed the feeling that performing gave him, describing “a really positive high from it [performing], like electricity running through my body”. Another student, who perceived that the instrument he played (recorder) was unfashionable, liked performing as it provided him with an opportunity to show people how good his instrument actually can be, when played well. This was interesting in that this student felt such ownership of the instrument that he felt the need to demonstrate its positives.

In a separate anecdote, another student also described how performance can add to a student’s emotional resilience and assisted them to deal with bullying. In this anecdote, the student had been picked on by a classmate for playing the recorder, which again, was perceived as ‘uncool’. When the classmate saw the student perform on the instrument and saw how talented the student was in the performance, the classmate stopped the bullying.

School and community impacts
A finding of qualitative interviews was that the impacts of Conservatorium programs are felt beyond the individual receiving tuition. These impacts extend to the wider school community including school families, and have impacts in the local community. The range of impacts highlighted by the interviews and focus groups is discussed below.

Enhancing music education offering within schools
All schools that participated in the qualitative phase of this evaluation reported that the Conservatorium programs enhanced the delivery of music education within the schools. The degree of enhancement varied across schools:

- For some of these schools, the Conservatorium programs were an integral part of a highly developed and comprehensive music program offering, where deliberate choices had been made to “bring in” highly skilled Conservatorium teachers (mostly for individual and small group tuition). One interviewee suggested that “in a regional area, it is harder to recruit music specialists onto staff”, therefore the use of peripatetic staff was necessary. The focus of these schools was not only to meet, but to exceed, the requirements of the syllabus and the relationship between the Conservatorium and the school was often seen as a partnership in this case. In these instances, the educators spoke of “developing massive expressive and technical skill in the students”
and “providing the next challenge for excelling students”, including through opportunities to attend masterclasses and workshops.

- At the other end of the spectrum, Conservatorium programs were viewed as crucial in allowing schools to fulfil the needs of the syllabus. Some of the schools reported not having the expertise on staff, or a reluctance of staff to teach music because they do not feel they have the required skills. One interviewee indicated that “music education often gets put to the back burner as many teachers are not skilled in music”.

Whilst some interviewees felt that the Conservatorium programs worked well in conjunction with foundation programs that were meeting many of the syllabus requirements, others acknowledged that their foundation programs were very limited, and not adequately supporting the syllabus. As noted above, the music skills of many teachers were not felt to be strong.

Part of the value of offering the Conservatorium programs in schools was the role their tutors could play in the professional development of these school teachers. In some instances, school teachers were able to be in the class whilst music lessons were taking place and one school reported that the classroom teachers “looked forward to it each week”. One interviewee recounted a time when a classroom teacher had to conduct a group performance at a public venue because the Conservatorium tutor was unavailable. This interviewee suggested that the classroom teacher wouldn’t have had the confidence to do this without involvement in the Conservatorium program.

Providing opportunities for performance was also a common theme raised by interviewees, with many schools suggesting that they did not have the expertise to develop performances, nor the connections through which to arrange performance opportunities. Many schools felt that this was a very worthwhile extension provided by the Conservatorium, beyond what they could offer internally.

Many schools reported that connections with the Conservatorium gave them an opportunity to expose their students to greater levels of musical talent than could be sourced internally. This included sourcing opportunities not regularly available in the region. One interviewee indicated that the school is “quite intentional about offering experiences to regional students that you could usually only get in Sydney”.

School engagement in music
In many instances, the impacts of enhanced music education transferred to greater engagement and improvement in other music activities, for instance:

- A growing whole of school focus on music was reported in some schools;
- In some schools, the staff have become more engaged with and enthusiastic about music as a result of involvement with the Conservatorium programs;
- Exposure to very talented, and often inspiring tutors, was felt to have increased the number of students enrolling in tuition for particular instruments;
- The offer of high quality individual tuition was reported to have strengthened one school’s music ensembles; and
- A greater breadth of opportunities was reported to be available through partnership with the Conservatoriums.
Enhancing school reputation

Enhancement of school reputation was a common impact reported by many schools involved in this phase of the evaluation. This was reportedly borne out by:

- increased enrolment requests;
- some schools becoming known for their performing arts profile; and
- positive feedback from the parents of students at schools, including some who indicated that their school’s music program was a major decision factor for enrolling their children there.

One school reported a turn-around in enrolments after several years of declining numbers and as a result has had to “zone” the school. Whilst this was attributed to the broader teaching philosophy encompassing a “whole of child” approach at the school, the Principal felt that the Conservatorium programs had played an important role in the success and appeal of the school.

Many schools noted the public relations value in having links to the Conservatorium, especially with respect to having opportunities for public performance. Furthermore, for some schools, being able to offer Conservatorium programs within the school was felt to provide them with a competitive advantage. This was particularly noted in the competitive private school market.

Resilience in the face of adversity

Some of the schools that participated in this phase of the evaluation reported that public perception is an issue for them. That is, the public perception of the school in general within their community is mostly negative. In these cases, engagement in Conservatorium programs was seen to be part of an overall move towards a more positive public profile, aiming to promote a sense of pride within the school amongst staff, students and their families, and creating a more positive environment.

In particular, where involvement with Conservatorium programs has led to a range of public performances, opportunities are often created to present the school and participating students in a positive light. In one case, the Principal interviewed suggested that the school, and its students, are perceived differently because they are participating in the community through performances, and because they are demonstrating skills and abilities in music, as well as positive behaviour. He went further to suggest that this increase in positive school profile has given the school “a little bit of resilience” when they are the subject of negative publicity or word of mouth, which can be very noticeable and damaging in a regional community.

“Music has the ability to get kids working towards a goal”

“It’s a conservative country town – they bring in visiting musicians, fill a void, bring in cultural activity”

“These kids are being upskilled and being used to showcase the school”

“Music program contributes to a positive outlook. Choir and band can’t solve all problems, but it is a good step.”

“Little bit of resilience when things aren’t going well”

“School is humanity factory – producing balanced, rational people. Music plays a huge part in
Greater engagement of student families

A greater level of engagement in school activities by the families of school students was an impact highlighted by a few schools. In particular, this was felt to be of great consequence in some low socio-economic communities where the parents have typically been quite disengaged. Examples of this greater engagement included:

- parents bringing students along to practice sessions and performances outside of school hours;
- parents showing support for their children by staying to watch concerts and by expressing pride in their children’s achievements;
- parent enthusiasm about the school music programs demonstrated through voluntary work to support the activities of the school band; and
- parents feeling encouraged to attend school speech and presentation days to watch their children perform in the band (the interviewee suggested that in the past only the parents of children receiving awards would typically attend these events).

Giving back to the community

All Conservatoriums involved in the qualitative phase of the evaluation have a strong focus on providing opportunities for performance. As such, the fostering of musical talent through these programs, has opened up opportunities for performance across each school’s community. Whilst this provides invaluable experience to the students, it is also a positive way for the schools to engage with and “give back” to their communities. Some examples included:

- tours to smaller schools within the region providing greater musical exposure to students in more remote schools;
- enhanced engagement with the Aboriginal communities in some regions; and
- concerts for nursing home residents, which in one case had reportedly developed in students an empathy for the residents and an improved confidence in communicating with them.

Whole of community events were recognised as another way in which Conservatorium programs could support the development of music across the whole community, and not just within specific schools. Examples were:

- The “Monster Band Day” organised by Mitchell Conservatorium, which bring students from all schools together for workshops and performance, and which have a community rather than a school focus;
- Eisteddfods, which were very well supported by some Conservatoriums and seen to be contributing to the success of the event. Further demonstrating this point, interviewees from one location reported that their Eisteddfods were often cancelled. They felt that the Conservatorium needed to be more involved than they were currently in order to support the event.

An anecdote from one Conservatorium illustrated the links that Conservatorium programs can make between children, schools and communities. In this case, children who had participated in Conservatorium programs performed in the local theatre to an audience of 950 people, raising significant funds for the community.
Influence on the culture of the region

Many interviewees noted the role that Conservatoriums had played in influencing the culture of the regions in which they operated and contributing to the liveability of these regions. Furthermore, the involvement of school students in the programs was felt to be central to this influence as was the partnership with schools.

“together with the Conservatorium we’ve influenced a level of vibrancy around music in the town and now many of the schools have taken this on”

“The Con plays a role in shaping this community”

“There is no other country town I’d want to live in”

“SW Music and the High School have now created a culture in the town where music has a

For one community in particular, a significant cultural shift had been observed, illustrated by the following anecdote:

Twenty years ago Deniliquin was reported to be overwhelmingly a sporting town where “if you played music you were a bit odd”. The work of the Conservatorium and the local high school is said to have been instrumental in creating a lifelong love of music in kids and a town where music has a stronghold. This report was supported by comments from many parents who noted the increased engagement of the whole community in music.

Operational issues – strengths and areas for improvement

Phase 2 interviews sought out information on what Principals, teachers and parents thought were the operating strengths and weaknesses of the Conservatorium programs delivered in their schools and attended by their children.

Interviews highlighted a general consensus that Conservatorium programs were working fairly well, operationally. In most cases, it was felt that Conservatorium programs were achieving their goals and operated without too much trouble or disruption.

Many operational issues were raised that were indicative of local conditions or related to specific cases. There were, however, some common themes when respondents were asked about program strengths, issues or areas for improvement.

In some cases, themes were highlighted in different interviews as strengths and weaknesses. This perhaps highlights the importance of key issues and illustrates that when Conservatoriums manage their operations well, it can have a significant impact on their success and reputation. These key issues are discussed below.

Interpersonal and teaching skills

Conservatorium teaching staff are vital to the success of Conservatorium programs in that they deliver services and are often the public face of the institution. Interview feedback suggests that in some circumstances, Conservatoriums clearly had the right staff. In these interviews, the skills, enthusiasm, professionalism, flexibility and effort of Conservatorium teaching staff were a major positive. In each town, specific Conservatorium staff were identified for excelling as music teachers and making a big contribution to the musical skills of pupils and to the music offering of the school.
One Conservatorium teacher was described by an acting Principal as “an exemplar of planning and organisation” for her approach to teaching a class of primary children. This teacher was highlighted across multiple schools and interviews for her energy, engagement, teaching skills and her ability to engage with children.

Another Conservatorium teacher was similarly praised by parents and teachers alike for her ability to teach and engage children and her easy and accessible manner. This teacher received special mention for going above and beyond her paid duties to provide kids with musical opportunities. Other teachers have also received special mention for the ability to engage kids, their musical and conducting skills and their professionalism.

Interestingly, the ability to teach and engage children was seen as more important than high level technical and musical skills. This view appeared to be more pronounced in relation to teaching primary school aged children.

In other circumstances, the quality of Conservatorium staff was reported as an area for improvement. The majority of negative feedback relating to Conservatorium teachers referred to problems with managing, relating to, and teaching students. Interviews highlighted teachers that were too gruff or angry, which put students off lessons and had even resulted in students changing teachers or stopping lessons. One parent discussed a campus program for young children where a teacher became openly hostile when a child placed a musical instrument in their mouth. It was found that teachers who had poor interpersonal skills became known amongst parents for their behaviour.

Other school and parent responses noted that some teachers were quite lacking in behaviour management skills when dealing with groups of children. This was seen to impact on group learning through disruption.

At times, a lack of interpersonal skills by some Conservatorium teachers has also created conflict with Principals and parents. In one specific instance, it was reported that some of the Conservatorium teachers did not integrate well with teaching staff at a school, often ignoring teachers in the staff room and generally providing the impression that they were not part of the school. Worse still, this Principal felt that Conservatorium teachers did not understand that to teach at the school, they were expected to understand and join in the school culture. In another anecdote, a misunderstanding between a conservatorium teacher and a parent over tuition fees was handled poorly by a teacher, who was reputed to have been quite rude. In both these anecdotes, Principals and parents questioned the motivations of Conservatorium teachers, asking whether the teacher was there to teach children and be a part of the school community, or were they simply “running a business”.

Communication
A Conservatorium’s ability to communicate with their clients impacts on the strength of their partnerships with schools, and the goodwill and patronage of parents. Conservatoriums received a mixed report on their ability to communicate.

Overall, feedback suggested that interviewees were reasonably happy with the level and content of communication they received from Conservatoriums. Despite this, interviews highlighted a range of situations where Conservatorium communications were an issue.

In school interviews, the most common area for improvement was for better communication between schools and Conservatoriums at the senior management level. Numerous interviews with senior school staff highlighted that schools were operating with insufficient information on Conservatorium services and goals, or were simply disengaged from their Conservatorium.
In some cases, new and acting senior school staff inherited Conservatorium programs when starting in their new role, without having had any explanation of current Conservatorium programs and offerings. One Principal, who was relatively new to the school, discussed that there was no documentation as to how the Conservatorium / school partnership worked or the full range of services provided by the Conservatorium. This Principal had to ask the Conservatorium for this information and only received it informally, in conversation.

In another instance, a new Principal expressed reservations about the way that Conservatorium programs were operating at the school and felt that the Conservatorium had not meaningfully engaged with the school to understand and mitigate the school’s concerns. This appeared to have had a detrimental impact on the Conservatorium's relationship with the school.

In other cases, Conservatoriums have been operating at schools (sometimes for many years), apparently without much genuine engagement with Principals about the role of the Conservatorium in the school and how services could be improved or extended. Interviews with some Principals highlighted small issues or apparent disengagement from Conservatorium programs that could potentially be remedied with some basic engagement and communication strategies.

Numerous school interviews also discussed a lack of dialogue over the day-to-day flow of information about schedules, absences, issues and problems, and other small organisational matters. Some interviews suggested that a yearly planning meeting would be beneficial. It was also mentioned by at least one school that there had been no feedback or evaluation of how children’s tuition was proceeding.

Communication issues were also raised by parents, with Conservatorium communications receiving a mixed, or slightly negative overall report. Some parents felt that Conservatorium communications were quite good, with one parent calling them “brilliant”, whilst another parent discussed how a Conservatorium teacher emailed and texted them to let them know of new opportunities and concerts that their child could participate in.

On the other hand, other parents felt that Conservatorium communications were lacking. Negative feedback mostly related to a lack of information on administrative issues. For example, interviews suggested that many parents do not understand lesson cancellation, make-up lessons and payment policies, and that these policies should be better communicated. Other parents called for an introduction pack or information sessions for all new students/parents that provide comprehensive information on the Conservatorium and the student’s instrument of choice.

**Individual tuition**

Individual tuition at schools raised a number of issues, mostly relating to lesson scheduling and attendance. Firstly, there was a great deal of difficulty in scheduling lessons around busy school, student and parent schedules. A second concern of parents and school teachers was that students that had their music lesson at the same time and day each week were potentially missing out on the same school classes. A few anecdotes related that this had in the past impacted on the school grades of some students.

Whilst the first issue may not have a ready solution, some interviews talked of having a changing roster of lesson times so that students did not consistently miss out on any one class. There was evidence, however, that many teachers were already taking this into account by changing their class timetable so that students did not miss out on specific classes.

A related concern in a few cases was that there were some problems experienced in accommodating individual tuition in schools. This feedback mostly related to one individual school. In this case, it was reported that individual Conservatorium lessons were being conducted at various rooms around the school, depending on availability. The
outcome of this situation was that students were not always aware of where their lesson was being held, causing delays in getting to and from their lesson. This cut into the amount of time they spent in the music lesson and reportedly caused some confusion with the school routine.

Another issue raised by many parents related to concerns that their children were not receiving the full lesson for which they had paid. In some instances, parents mentioned that lessons were often late to start, but still finished on time. A further issue was that some parents had enrolled their children in, and were paying for, individual lessons, only to find that their children were receiving group lessons. Parents also discussed paying for a term’s lessons, but the teacher being away for one/some of these lessons. Many parents were vocal about these issues, often perceiving that Conservatoriums, or their staff, had been paid for services that they had not provided.

Financial
The cost of Conservatorium services was raised as an issue, particularly by public school staff and parent interviews. Principals were supportive of their school Conservatorium programs, with many stating that Conservatoriums were able to offer skills and services that schools could not readily replicate and that they were found to be valuable. A number of these Principals would have been happy to expand the services provided by Conservatoriums, but were restricted from doing so because of limited budgets for these activities.

Parents and school staff also discussed the financial impacts of Conservatorium tuition. It was observed that the cost of individual tuition was not insubstantial, especially where many children are undertaking multiple paid activities and where families had multiple children undertaking activities.

A further point was that the cost of Conservatorium programs can prohibit the participation of children from low socioeconomic status (LSES) backgrounds. It was suggested that making available more funding to engage children from these backgrounds would increase participation from these equity target groups and could potentially lead to lower rates of crime, drugs and welfare for these groups.

With regard to scholarships, Conservatoriums are making campus programs accessible to some children from LSES backgrounds. However, there were a number of concerns expressed about these financial assistance schemes:

- Scholarships could potentially be better targeted to reach LSES kids, to increase music participation.
- Children often had to demonstrate a certain level of proficiency in order to be eligible for scholarships. It was noted by a number of participants that this might mean that children with a natural talent or strong interest could miss out because they don’t have the financial resources to attain this initial level of proficiency.
- Scholarships are relatively short-term – in one region, receiving a scholarship one year made a child ineligible the following year. When financial support is withdrawn, musical education may be interrupted.
- Many interview participants expressed a desire to see more funds being directed into financial support schemes, and more active promotion of these schemes.

Professional development
It was noted in interviews with schools that in some cases, where Conservatorium teachers were taking groups and classes, school teachers were participating in these groups and were receiving indirect professional development in running music groups. These benefits were noted in a number of schools by both Principals and the teachers themselves. Interviews at these schools highlighted that some of these teachers were utilising materials and techniques, learnt from their participation in Conservatorium groups, in their regular classes.
One teacher advised that, whilst they had previously been reticent to teach music, having sat in with a Conservatorium teacher over a number of terms, she would love to have a go at teaching music ‘now that she had seen it modelled’. So while Conservatorium group programs came at a cost to the school, there were multiple benefits.

Convenience
A strong theme in the feedback from parents was that the convenience of having music lessons in school was a strength of Conservatorium programs. The convenience factor was considered particularly important by parents who lived out of town or who had work commitments. These parents were often very busy and noted difficulties in managing out of school/work hour activities. This feedback related more to parents who had children enrolled in individual tuition at schools.

Student perspective

Conservatorium teachers
Teachers were a central issue for students when asked their likes and dislikes relating to their experience in Conservatorium programs. Numerous students, across many of the student group interviews, highlighted their Conservatorium teacher as a positive factor in their music lesson or class. Teachers were described as “interactive”, “supportive and friendly” and “fun”. In one example of the positive views of Conservatorium teachers, when asked what was the biggest benefit of participation in a Conservatorium program, one student discussed his great relationship with his teacher, whom he viewed as a mentor.

Group work
As discussed in the student impacts section of this report, students also liked the social aspect of playing music and learning in groups. Certain students interviewed indicated that they would like to see more group lessons and/or more students participating in the band. It was suggested by a younger student that group music activities with more senior students would be good, as they could assist the younger students.

A couple of operational issues relating to group learning were highlighted by students. Groups that have students with disparate levels of musical ability and knowledge can be difficult for more advanced students, as the group has to move at the pace of the students with the least ability. This can lead to advanced students becoming bored. Another issue was that in certain class situations, it can be difficult for individual students to get sufficient attention from the teacher.

More engaging classes
Student interviews found that Conservatorium classes, or certain aspects of these classes, could be boring. Firstly, it was suggested that the music choice of Conservatorium teachers was sometimes boring, or that too much time was spent on the same piece of music. A number of student interviews discussed their desire for greater input into the choice of music that they are learning and performing. It was suggested that the inclusion of more contemporary styles of music, such as hip-hop and pop music, would be more engaging for students.

Another suggestion from one student group was that music classes would be much more engaging by incorporating physical elements into the lesson. This particularly applies to younger, primary aged classes. In the context of a classroom ukulele program, students thought that it was boring to sit still and strum the same one or two chords each lesson. It was suggested by these students that outdoor classes or incorporating dance and movement into classes could make them more engaging.
Further, students at one school who received lessons in dull and sometimes cramped rooms thought that more colourful and interesting surroundings may make learning easier and more pleasurable. It was suggested that learning could be benefitted by informational posters and pictures relating to their learning.

**Target equity groups**

The Regional Conservatorium Grants Program (RCPG) Program Guidelines document specifically outlines five equity groups being targeted for improved engagement. These groups include Aboriginal students; students with a disability; Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities; gifted and talented students and Students in isolated and remote communities.

**Aboriginal students**

Interviews highlighted that Conservatoriums are working with Aboriginal children in some schools, with positive anecdotal evidence of the impacts of these programs. However, there was a notable absence of information about Aboriginal engagement in campus programs. That is not to say that there are no Aboriginal students involved in campus programs, but it suggests that the main area for engaging this equity group is through in-school programs.

Two schools involved in the evaluation have significant Aboriginal populations, with approximately 61 percent and 55 percent of their students who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, respectively. Feedback from Conservatorium programs in these schools has been very positive, with reports of high levels of satisfaction and engagement.

Other schools included in Phase 2 of the evaluation also had smaller but significant Aboriginal student populations, with a number of teachers acknowledging that Conservatorium music programs delivered through schools are enabling students to have experiences with and exposure to music “that they wouldn’t otherwise have”.

There were a number of anecdotes from school staff and Aboriginal parents illustrating the engagement with Aboriginal students and communities:

- One school ran a program in 2014, specifically for year 5/6 Aboriginal students. As part of this program, students learned about local Aboriginal culture, putting their knowledge to music to communicate and share with others. The students made their own music and CD, which reportedly sold very successfully. The program culminated in a student performance, including a solo by one student.

- One parent reported that the confidence gained through Conservatorium programs had enabled his child to give the Welcome to Country at a school event, in front of peers and her Elders.

- Public performances, outside of school hours, provided by one Conservatorium had significantly increased the engagement of Aboriginal students and their parents through attending and performing in these events. This provided opportunities for a school staff member and the Conservatorium tutor to engage with these parents.

Creating more opportunities for Aboriginal students to participate in campus programs may be an area for future growth.

**Students with a disability**

A repeating theme across the interviews and focus groups was the inclusiveness of Conservatorium music programs. In a number of participating schools, Conservatorium programs were seen to provide opportunities for students with a disability and helped to manage some emotional and behavioural challenges students face due to disabilities.
There were a number of stories of children with learning and other developmental disabilities being engaged through school programs with positive outcomes. Examples of these include:

- A stage one child who is autistic and selective mute. Last year, he was petrified and did not move in the end-of-year performance. This year, the tutor from the Conservatorium has him moving and participating in group classes. He now demonstrates a sense of rhythm.

- Specific instances of tutors who cater for the “unique needs” of children who have been identified as “being on the spectrum”.

- Parents reporting that children on the spectrum have developed better coping skills, flexibility and focus since being involved in Conservatorium music programs.

- A foster parent reporting that she was seeing improved mental health in her children who have developmental disabilities related to foetal alcohol syndrome. Through the Conservatorium music program offered at the school, the children were developing a sense of self-worth and achievement, as well as a way to interact socially. All of these factors were believed to be contributing to positive mental health.

Campus programs were highlighted as highly inclusive in some areas, with parents referring to the campus as “a supportive community”, particularly for students with disabilities. Examples provided include the following:

- A conservatorium making programs accessible to a child with cerebral palsy confined to a wheelchair. This child did a solo performance at a recent concert. It was also noted that other children and parents are responding to this and supporting difference.

- A “side-by-side choir” which combines students with and without a disability to perform together.

Evidence was gathered that at least two of the campuses in Phase 2 of the evaluation also offered music therapy programs on campus for young people with more “serious disabilities”. One parent praised the music therapy program, suggesting that it provided an opportunity for her child to do something that he would not be able to access in a metropolitan area. Specifically, music therapy has helped her child to reduce stress and deal with anxiety and she suggested that “music days are happy days”. Related to this, there was some concern raised that the Conservatorium staff providing these programs may be vulnerable to burnout. It was felt that increasing the number of staff capable of providing these services, will increase support and allow for continuity of services when individual staff take holidays.

By creating an environment “supportive of difference” through both in-school and campus programs, it was suggested that this impacted on the way children without disabilities see differently-abled peers “in a totally different light”, broadening the perspectives of students without disabilities and decreasing stigma around disabilities. One parent extended this to parents – that seeing children with disabilities “having a go” helped to increase tolerance amongst parents also.

Other target groups
The nature of the case study areas targeted in this phase meant that very little information was gathered regarding engagement with CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) students. The communities where the four Conservatoriums are based do not have significant CALD populations, and very few of the participating parents identified as being from CALD communities.

Similarly, while all of the Conservatoriums were located in regional towns, and provided services to smaller communities, limited information was gathered on programs delivered to isolated and remote communities. Parents and teachers did, however, make a number of comments about being lucky to have Conservatorium programs in regional towns.
Information about students in Gifted and Talented programs was not specifically gathered; however it was evident that students who are musically gifted are very well serviced through campus programs. By offering high quality music tuition, scholarships to talented students, masterclasses and workshops with professional musicians, and opportunities for “rubbing shoulders with real performers” many campus programs appeared to be tailored to give gifted and talented students opportunities to be extended. Several of the participating schools also saw the Conservatorium programs as contributing to the overall reputation of the school as a centre for music excellence. In these cases, conservatorium programs were contributing to the offerings for gifted and talented students, and giving other students “permission to shine”. However, it was pointed out at one of these schools that “if a child excels academically, at sports and music, there can be clashes.”