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**Title:** Easy access? Finding one's way from secondary to post-secondary music education and training in Australia

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**Easy Access?**  
**Finding one's way from secondary to post-secondary music education and training**

## **Abstract**

*Access to post-secondary music education and training in Australia is more diverse than ever before. In addition to universities and vocational education providers, a growing number of private and public providers deliver higher and vocational education; there is a vast range of non-accredited mentoring opportunities and internships; and a growing number of secondary schools offer post-secondary study prior to matriculation.*

*Recognising these developments, the Music Council of Australia is currently mapping the range of post-secondary music education and training in Australia, cross-referencing these findings with current trends across the Australian Higher Education sector.*

*This paper reports on initial findings from the first stage of this comprehensive audit of music education and training. With an emphasis on informing decision-making, the paper addresses the range of higher education programs currently available and the ease of access to, and transition between, secondary and post-secondary programs. Initial findings indicate a diverse range of study options and pathways, but also suggest that informed decision-making is a growing challenge for prospective students, mentors and parents.*

## **Introduction**

Fifty years ago, students wishing to pursue music studies at post-secondary level had only six options available to them in Australia: the New South Wales Conservatorium, Elder Conservatorium, the University of Melbourne, the Tasmanian Conservatorium, Queensland Conservatorium and the University of Sydney. The University of Melbourne hosted the first music studies in Australia from 1891, and it remains to this day the only university in Australia ever to dedicate a faculty to music. In contrast, in 2011 the National Council of Tertiary Music Schools (NACTMUS) included more than twenty members, which is a good indication that the number of institutions offering music has at the very least tripled over the past five decades. In addition, many of Australia's 37 public and two private universities, and 150 other post-secondary education providers, offer fields of study that intersect with music in various ways. Whilst many of the institutions do not offer programs that are specifically music by name, the range of options for post-secondary music study is much more diverse than ever before. The data presented in this paper do not include responses from the private or vocational education providers because the primary focus of this research phase was longitudinal data from universities; however, given that their enrolments are significant we do include them within the discussion.

The diversity presents a growing challenge for potential tertiary music students and their teachers: namely, how best to filter through the available options and select a program that matches the emerging musician's professional goals and interests. In seeking to better inform that choice by presenting a clear picture of the available programs and the institutions that offer them, the objective of this research is to gather detailed information about a diverse range of post-secondary music education and training. Within this remit the research will examine issues of access and transition from secondary to post-secondary programs across the higher education sector, aligning these issues with the recommendations of the *Review into Australian Higher Education* (Bradley, 2008), which recommended increased access to higher education as a matter of social equity. Bradley's claim that "the public-private divide is no longer a sensible distinction" (p. 1) is taken into account by including data from the private sector, which has grown significantly in the years since the initial post-secondary music audit was undertaken for the Australian Music Centre in 2004 (Lancaster, 2004a).

## **Approach**

The study commenced in 2010 and is expected to complete in 2013. The research employs a mixed methodology, gathering both quantitative and qualitative data through surveys and interviews. The survey design was informed by the 2004 post-secondary music study (Lancaster, 2004b), which provided baseline data. In 2009, a reference group of six academics contributed to the design of an updated survey, which was piloted with 49 music institutions from university, Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and the private sector. The survey was subsequently organised into a series of smaller surveys designed to address a number of research foci, specifically: programs, enrolment data, delivery and assessment, supporting resources and facilities, community engagement, research, collaborations, and interaction with graduate destinations. The creation of a number of smaller surveys was undertaken in response to feedback from the trial and reference group, and addressed three concerns: firstly, that the response rate would be higher if the survey was a manageable length; secondly, that organisation of the questions into distinct themes would ensure that respondents could focus their attention and, in the case of some institutions, allocate each

theme to the most appropriate member of staff, prompting rich, well-informed responses; and finally, that a series of surveys undertaken over several months would be more likely to enable a relationship of trust to develop between the research team and participating institutions (Pinsonneault & Kraemer, 1993).

As the research progresses, each of the surveys is administered to those post-secondary institutions that offer music education and training relevant to the issues/themes in focus. Participant responses are coded for analysis, and qualitative data is analysed using inductive coding and the development of thematic groups. These groups will form nodes within NVivo once the datasets become too large to analyse manually. Supplementary interviews scheduled for mid-2012 to mid-2013 will enable the research team to validate and interrogate the data amassed from previous phases of the research. It is anticipated that these interviews will be conducted face-to-face. As they emerge, the Music Council of Australia will publish the findings as raw data and also in analysed comparative forms. Participating institutions will receive copies of the aggregated results as each phase of the study is completed.

Reported here, the first survey sought to align with the Australian Higher Education Base Funding Review (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2011) by gathering initial data that would enable useful comparisons between the 2004 and 2010 data. This led to targeted sampling to ensure the inclusion of higher education institutions that offer music-specific programs. Invitations were issued in 2010 to 23 Australian institutions, of which 22 completed the survey in early 2011. Responses were drawn from institutions' 2010 institutional data. Reported here is data from the twenty university respondents.

## **Results and discussion**

### **The contemporary context**

In the past, most Australian post-secondary music institutions focused on performance training in the classical Western European tradition; were independent of universities; and were relatively free from the demands and constraints of universities. Now, as (Lancaster) (2006, p. v) confirms, music institutions confront "the reality that traditional performance is diminishing in social relevance and the professions into which future music graduates will move are more diverse than ever before and clearly less dependent on conventional [classical] music training". De Haan (1998, p. 17) expands on what this might mean for music institutions in the 21st century:

Given the multiplicity and simultaneity of musical genres now in co-existence, the opportunity presents itself for a new educational model to be developed in which the individual student ... can discover and develop areas of music-making with which they have a personal interest. Essential within this approach is the need to support individuality and aesthetic difference...

Whilst few programs allow the degree of flexibility advocated by De Haan, our initial findings indicate that the Australian post-secondary music education and training sector has diversified since 2004 to include a raft of options in addition to traditional performance programs. However, most universities have yet to fully adapt to the context in which students and graduates operate.

Networking provides a good example here: as Arthurs (2004, p. 10) reminds us, "Much of the music we experience today comes to us through various media", and how we access that music will often depend on the networks in which we operate. Teaching within this network society, "through hybrid spaces consisting of traditional physical spaces and cyberspaces" (Alexenberg, 2008, p. 14), presents the potential for complex networks and new forms of pedagogy characterised by "differentiation, interaction, self-organization, and emergence" (ibid, p. 15). This is a common challenge, and one that is already being explored by other disciplines. Indeed, the hybrid environment combining real and virtual spaces is one with which students are already familiar, and it has great relevance and significant potential for application to learning environments that need to consider individual variances.

In *The Australian Guide to Careers in Music*, Hannan (2003) lists over 150 categories of professional opportunities for musicians and he outlines the nature of work, potential remuneration range and required training. Initial results suggest that music institutions reflect this diversity: providers of vocational training (mainly TAFE and private providers) deliver national training packages developed in consultation with industry; and higher education providers, including many TAFE and private providers, offer a range of specialist study including performance, musicology, composition and teaching, music therapy, music theatre, music technology and music management. However, as musicians' work evolves, so must the courses that prepare and sustain them: hence, an understanding of musicians' work across multiple contexts has become vitally important.

Music has always embraced many traditions and styles. What musicians do and how they do it parallels social, economic and technological factors as much as new forms of artistry. Current trends in collaborative practice and recording have created new careers such as those emerging directly from rapid advances in technology. Now very competitive, many programs in music technology demand high-quality applicants for an increasing range of specialist studies. Increasing reliance on technology is, for example, making room for more specialist librarians; online publishing in both audio and visual formats keep copyright managers on guard; and there is an army of options in music's various associations with engineering, production, management, distribution, publishing and law.

Changes in musicians' work have challenged institutions to rethink the programs they offer, and this is reflected in the 2010 data. Previously available only at postgraduate level at the University of Melbourne, music therapy is now also offered to undergraduates at the University of Queensland. The music theatre degree at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA) is now joined by more recent programs at Central Queensland University Conservatorium (CQUC), the Arts Academy (University of Ballarat), and from 2011, by the Queensland Conservatorium, Griffith University (QCGU). Screen composition, originally the postgraduate responsibility of the Australian Film Television and Radio School, now appears in varying measures elsewhere.

The popular music industry heralds numerous careers for musicians as performers, audio/video engineers, producers, entrepreneurs, agents and distributors. Recognising this, more institutions have adopted major study options in popular (often called contemporary) music. Most providers within the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector focus on 'commercial contemporary' music performance, audio technology and music business as complementary pathways to this industry. Box Hill Institute in Victoria is a notable example: one of the first accredited *Digidesign* Pro Schools offering certification in *Pro Tools*, essential to cutting edge production of live and recorded (audio/screen) formats, Box Hill Institute now offers music programs at both vocational and higher education levels.

Although contemporary music remains a particular focus for providers of vocational training, it is also found in various guises at some universities. Southern Cross University (SCU) was the first university to move away from traditional training and has focused on contemporary music since the late-1980s. The Gold Coast Campus of QCGU has also become a contemporary music campus, co-located and collaborating with multimedia. Whilst other universities offer popular music as an option, only these two have devoted their resources exclusively to popular music.

Hannan (2000, p. 20) reminds us that: "Contemporary popular music practice typically involves instrumental performance, vocal performance, songwriting, record production and business skills in equal amounts." With the diversity of professional options open to musicians and the likelihood that a sustainable career will involve work within multiple genres, it is important that institutions should, as Wills (in Letts, 2000, p. 17) suggests, "not look at a hierarchy of musical styles but ... accept that there are different types of interest, different types of specialism, from pop music to rock music, experimental music, contemporary music, classical music, and jazz". Whilst the jury is still out on whether institutions can keep up with the rapid pace of change in popular music, its recognition as a formal training option cannot help but strengthen its appeal as a valuable pathway for more than just aspiring bands. Clearly its growing presence within the university sector has underlined the range of specific and generic skills necessary for survival in the music industry.

Australian TAFE institutions have been eligible to offer their own higher education degree courses since 2002, and ten institutions currently offer degrees without a university partner. TAFE programs therefore range from pre-vocational certificate programs through to complete degree programs. These include very successful programs in contemporary music performance, composition, audio engineering and music business.

In Australia, all TAFE awards are full fee paying programs. Students enrolled at eligible institutions are able to access the Federal Government FEE-HELP, which provides a loan to cover the cost of tuition, but they are not currently eligible for Commonwealth Supported Places (CSP), which covers part of the total cost to the student. Thus, students undertaking awards outside the university sector are disadvantaged by lack of access to government-supported places. Both students and institutions feel the impact of this: Hare (2011) suggests that the financial model is a major factor in some TAFE institutions struggling to make a profit. With the removal from 2012 of forced limits (capped places) on enrolments across the sector it has become more important to the TAFE sector to gain access to supported places, and it is likely that CSP access will soon be available to TAFE students. This will have a marked influence on the study choices of many students given that TAFE course fees are much less than those for university courses, and that more TAFE providers are offering competing, degree-level programs.

In light of these changes, TAFE institutions have proposed that: "TAFE institutes providing bachelor degrees might be called Polytechnics" (Skidmore, 2011, p. 3) offering teaching and learning programs while universities offer research. Equally, the new Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency act (2011) suggests that TAFE institutions offering degrees and meeting a number of additional minimum standards may apply for the title of 'Australian University College'. In Victoria alone there are four TAFE institutions that may reach the minimum standards within the next five years.

These developments parallel the constant change experienced by universities over the past three decades. In 1982 each Australian state was required by the federal government to combine smaller Colleges of Advanced Education (CAEs), reducing the total number from 79 to 47. Many of these Colleges ran crucial courses in the humanities and education. Six years later Australian Higher Education Policy known as the Dawkins Review (DEET, 1988) required institutions with less than 2,000 students to merge with a university. A result of this was that CAEs and universities were combined in 1991 to create the unified national system. Over the course of these changes almost all of Australia's arts schools amalgamated with universities and became university departments, often devolving leadership to a larger faculty. Further cuts to higher education in the late 1990s led to additional amalgamation and far less budgetary control at departmental level. One of the results of amalgamation was that institutions formerly concerned only with teaching and learning, and now absorbed into the university sector, were also expected to undertake research. Ironically the current situation in Australia is likely to result in a single higher education sector that incorporates a two-tiered TAFE sector and, with the introduction of rankings drawn from results of research assessment within the new framework (Excellence for Research in Australia - ERA), a two-tiered university sector.

Concern that TAFE providers do not support a research culture at a level sufficient for degree study is countered with the argument that TAFE institutions are well suited to offer applied programs such as contemporary music and audio engineering, with staff who focus on industry relevant practice and quality education rather than on research. Aware of this concern, some private providers now report the inclusion of introductory research training within their programs, and universities are grappling with increasing demands to prepare career-ready graduates. Whilst the dual sector research-teaching debate continues, continued high enrolments in programs such as those at the Australian Institute of Music (AIM), Box Hill Institute and North Melbourne Institute of TAFE (NMIT) would suggest that they are meeting applicants' expectations.

Surprisingly, the 2004 study found TAFE institutions less likely to interact with industry than universities. At that stage, the potential for the TAFE framework to provide clear pathways into universities was yet to be widely realised. The higher education framework now contains a wealth of such possibilities, with various entry and exit points and scope for lifelong learning. The findings from this first phase of 2010 research strongly indicate that there is strong demand for multiple pathways in post-secondary music education and training, and that students may wish to commence in one sector and finish in another. Indeed, many university graduates transition from university into TAFE courses to gain necessary skills in diverse areas such as music business, sound engineering and arts management.

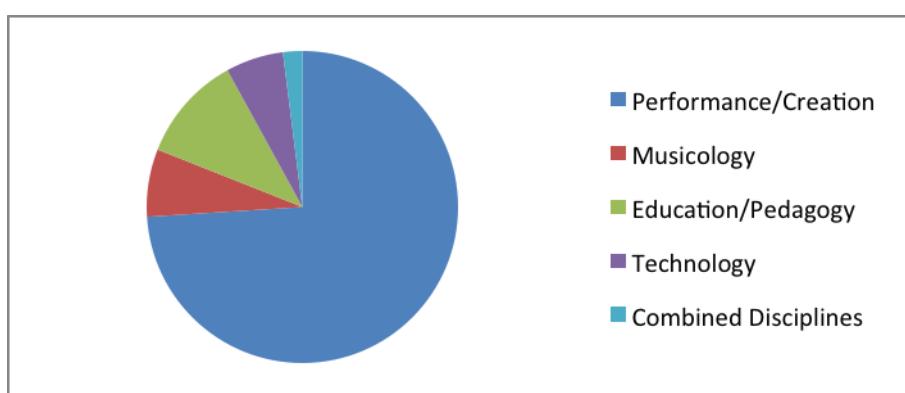
Recognising that musicians are more likely to need a diversity of skills to sustain a career (Bennett, 2008), several universities reported that they encourage activities to develop informed, well-rounded and self-motivated graduates. Still, the findings suggest that institutions could do more to forge effective industry links. The nature of music careers is such that many music graduates will work as freelance musicians, which means they don't relate to a single career destination in the traditional sense. Few universities reported activities to assist with career readiness beyond short-term projects in local communities or with organisations such as festivals, orchestras and opera companies, and few appeared to exploit non-traditional alternatives with the commercial sector or with Indigenous companies. Fewer than 20% of universities reported that they draw on industry advice to inform their courses, even fewer offered work experience or field placements, and fewer still provided showcase opportunities with industry personnel for their graduates. Despite a number of

providers specifically targeting Indigenous students since 2004, survey data reveal that with the exception of projects such as the annual QCGU Tennant Creek Music Project (Bartleet, 2009), engagement with Indigenous communities remains a rarity.

### The range of music programs

The most obvious change found in the program data between 2004 and 2010 is a reduction of 29% in the number of undergraduate programs. In 2004 the respondents reported 64 different undergraduate programs, including a number of specialised awards such as a Bachelor of Music Theatre or Bachelor of Jazz Studies. For a number of reasons, most universities have over time rationalised these various awards under generic titles such as a Bachelor of Music or Bachelor of Creative (or Performing) Arts. It is therefore not surprising that this research confirms only 46 different undergraduate programs in 2010. The diversity of awards uncovered in the 2004 survey were testimony to the wide range of music careers for which students were prepared, and whilst the recent trend toward reducing the number of awards may have changed the titles, to a large extent the range of choice among Australian music institutions remains broad. Prospective musicians have the chance to explore and experiment with their emerging careers and identities, and fewer now opt for performance in its traditional guises. This extends to a myriad of teaching approaches beyond traditional face-to-face and studio teaching.

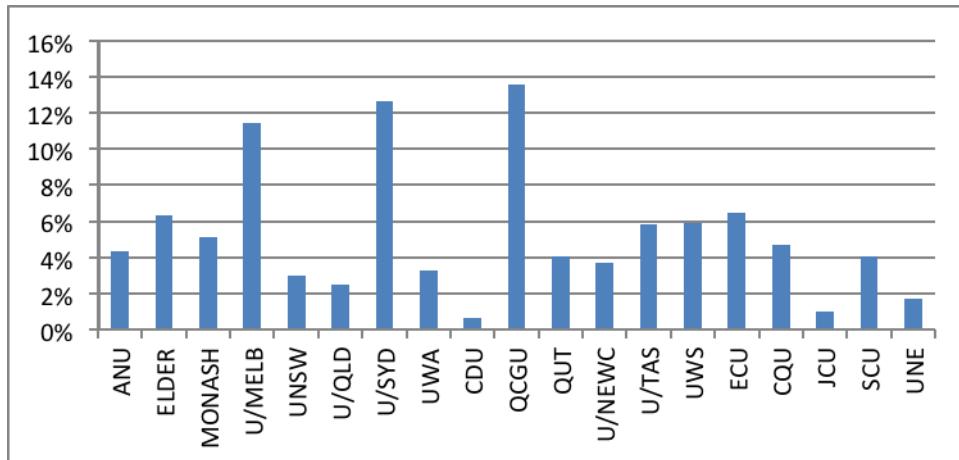
The distribution of program types across the university sector is enlightening. Programs related to performance and creation (composition) dominate the sector, accounting for 74% of undergraduate enrolment. The remaining areas of study - education/pedagogy (11%), musicology (7%), technology (6%) and music combined with other disciplines (2%) – combine to make up less than half of the student numbers in the practical studies areas. Figure 1 demonstrates this overall distribution of study areas.



**Figure 1: Distribution of enrolments in programs of study (2010)**

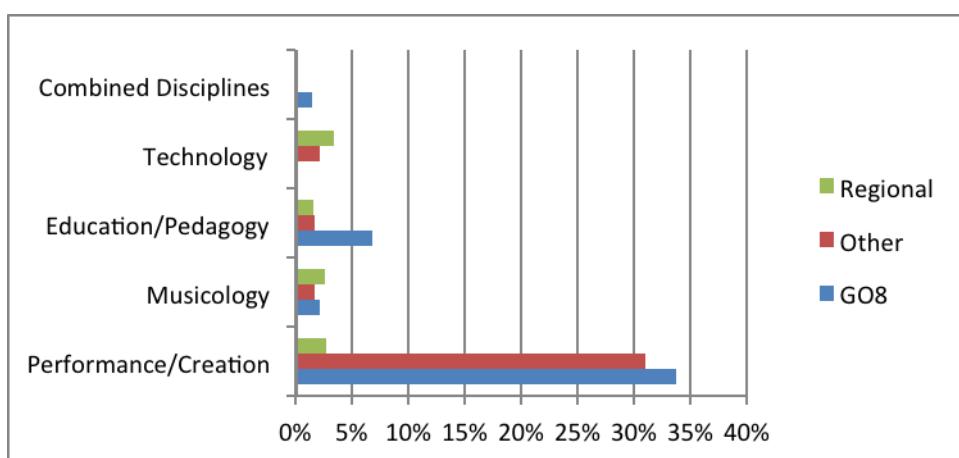
Dividing the twenty participating universities into three distinct types – the Group of Eight traditional universities (GO8), other metropolitan universities, and regional universities – the distribution becomes even more marked. The majority of music students were enrolled in GO8 (50%) and 'other' universities (40%), with only 10% of music enrolments in regional universities. These figures to some extent disguise the distribution among universities themselves: whilst the GO8 might have more music enrolments than the other universities, it

was a non-GO8 university that held the most enrolments in undergraduate music programs. QCGU held 14% of the total undergraduate enrolments, ahead of the University of Sydney (13%) and the University of Melbourne (11%). Figure 2 shows the distribution of music students by university in 2010.



**Figure 2: Distribution of music enrolments by university (2010)**

Whereas in regional universities there was a relatively equal spread across enrolments in technology, education, musicology and performance/creation, likely to be the result of smaller institutions meeting a wide range of student needs, for the GO8 and non-regional universities by far the largest number of enrolments existed in the field of performance/creation. Although enrolments in education/pedagogy represented only a small proportion of the overall numbers, the GO8 universities dominated this field. The GO8 were also the only institutions to report combined degrees, whilst regional universities had the highest percentage of enrolments in technology programs. Figure 3 illustrates this distribution by field across the university groups.



**Figure 3: Distribution of enrolments in study programs across university groups (2010)**

The 2004 research found that Associate Degrees and Diplomas were disappearing, but amid the diversity of options they appear to be making a comeback. As one example, in 2012 the University of Western Sydney College will launch a two-year Associate Degree in Creative Industries that incorporates practical components in seven targeted industry areas: Interactive and Digital Design; Music and Performing Arts; Film, Television and Radio; Writing and Publishing; Advertising and Marketing; Media and Communication; and Visual Arts. Delivered by academic staff and industry practitioners, the course plans to utilise case study practice to give students 'real world' experiences. Consultant to the program, Art Phillips, explains that this is not only an award in its own right, but also provides "a pathway to a higher-level university qualification" (2011, p. 43).

The data quoted thus far do not include the private or vocational education providers, as this component of the research had its primary focus on universities. Nonetheless, whilst the number of private providers in music is relatively small their enrolments are significant. The most comprehensive of them, Sydney's Australian Institute of Music (AIM), attracts the highest number of music enrolments in Australia. Students are enrolled in vocational, undergraduate and postgraduate programs in classical music, popular music, jazz, music theatre and music technology. The AIM offers an example of seamless transition between educational sectors, enrolling high school students in accelerated learning programs that offer credit towards post-secondary programs of various kinds. Even without the secondary and vocational options, the AIM higher education programs enrol higher numbers than any Australian university. Dual sector provider Box Hill Institute (BHI) also attracts significant music enrolments. With over 400 students enrolled in the BHI Bachelor of Applied Music and Bachelor of Applied Business in Music Industry programs, BHI comes in fifth in terms of enrolment numbers after AIM, QCGU, and the Universities of Sydney and Melbourne.

Another example of successful dual sector provision is the smaller Northern Melbourne Institute of Tafe (NMIT) in Melbourne, which offers a well-subscribed undergraduate program in contemporary music performance. From 2012, NMIT has also offered a music industry program that allows for specialisation in audio production, composition or music business. With a focus on building access pathways for students, NMIT offers vocational tuition directly to three secondary schools. Moving against the university trend towards generic programs, some private providers choose to focus on specific awards. In six campuses across the country, for example, the School of Audio Engineering (SAE) attracts significant enrolments in their undergraduate audio programs, competing with those universities that offer music technology. Other smaller private providers specialise by music genre: for example, the Jazz Music Institute in Brisbane.

As can be seen in these examples, many private providers have moved from their original focus on vocational education to become higher music education institutions, and many have adopted a dual sector approach; however, this space is no longer limited to private providers. One of the most distinctive differences in the data between 2004 and 2010 is the growing number of dual sector universities, which increases ease of transition between vocational and higher education programs. The 2009 Review of Vocational Programs in Music (IBSA, 2010) ensured that these programs are not only industry-driven but also transition-friendly, so that universities might be encouraged to grant prior learning credit for studies completed in vocational programs. Central Queensland University (CQU) is one such example with an articulation agreement between the Sunshine Coast Institute of TAFE and the CQU Sunshine Coast campus at Noosaville. Acknowledging the possible transitions from diploma studies in

vocational training, CQU will normally give one-year credit towards the undergraduate music program to applicants who hold an Advanced Diploma. Following this agreement, in 2011 CQU enrolled the first intake of students into creative music technologies and contemporary music, two specialisation fields within the CQU Bachelor of Music. This practice, replicated elsewhere in Australia, is aligned with that of degree-awarding TAFE institutions that facilitate similar transition pathways.

### **Where to go, what to do**

The findings reported above suggest a need to rethink the approach taken to assist students with their decision-making about where and what to study. We begin by considering the institution and what it offers to the student, particularly in regard to program detail. There is such diversity among institutions and their programs that even the ‘standard’ Bachelor of Music (BMus) title deserves closer scrutiny. A BMus at one institution might comprise very different components than at another, and the way in which these are offered (and assessed) may also vary enormously. Even where the components are the same, the requirements of the degree will differ in relation to what is compulsory, what is open to choice, and the weightings given to various components. Some BMus programs have a comprehensive structure, whilst others maintain a focus on performance or composition, perhaps in a particular genre. Careful consideration of the credit point structure will give a good indication of the overall balance and weighting of an individual subject. Aspiring classical instrumental performers may want to see a program that has most credit points aligned with their principal study and associated activities such as orchestra or chamber music, while aspiring musicologists may prefer to see the credit points aligned elsewhere.

A particularly neglected consideration appears to be that the effectiveness of a course is dependent on its 'fit' with the student. Ascertaining the fit requires further investigation along with the confidence to ask questions that reveal the details. For example, what combinations of study are available, and how are these timetabled? How many hours of tuition are offered to performance majors, and in what format? If performance is the focus, what ensembles and relevant opportunities are available? Other questions the prospective student might need to consider include how the course structure approaches specialisation: for example, whether it limits specialist study until later in the course or, conversely, offers few opportunities to try new things. Who are the teachers? Are they active within the industry, and what is their reputation both as educators and as professionals? The answers to such questions help to build a stronger foundation on which to make an informed choice.

Location may also be an important factor to consider in determining the suitability of a course. Some locations offer students opportunities to observe, network and participate in the industry. Whilst a city may seem the more obvious choice, there are regional centres that offer unrivalled opportunities to engage in the music sector from the earliest stages of training. Aligned with this are personal considerations: will the student be more likely to thrive in a city or in a regional centre, and will the student benefit from or cope with being away from home, family and peer networks?

This study has begun to explore the layers of access to post-secondary music education in Australia. Initial findings confirm a diversity of options, but they suggest a need to further develop seamless transitions between the various secondary, vocational and higher education elements alongside a better understanding of how the many options might align with students’ aspirations and interests. This makes the challenges facing students and their advisors especially evident.

## Closing comments

The most complex element in the post-secondary study equation is the individual student. If we define 'musician' as an umbrella term under which people build unique careers featuring multiple, changing roles, the concept of a music degree changes considerably from the traditional, performance-focused course. During secondary school study, few students will have begun to explore the myriad career opportunities in and on the periphery of music. Many tertiary institutions have been slow to acknowledge the need to address the breadth of career opportunities, which means that this exploration is often minimal or absent during undergraduate training. In reality, building and sustaining a successful career remains largely the responsibility of the graduate.

The complexity and rapid rate of change in the provision of post-secondary music, and the increasing ease with which students can move between different contexts and providers, offers a range of choice unlike ever before. However, the advantages of these multiple options can only be realised if the student is fully informed. Our analysis has shown that potential students need to investigate course options beyond information sessions and marketing materials, enabling them to negotiate study pathways in line with their emerging musician identities. We hope that the mapping commenced here will eventually be able to make a useful contribution to this investigation.

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