



ANU School of Music Review

Panel Report

Site visit held on the 14-16 August 2023

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Review panel members

- Professor Anna Reid, Sydney Conservatorium of Music, Sydney University (Chair of the Panel)
- Professor Sarah Hill, Faculty of Music, University of Oxford
- Professor Liam Viney, School of Music, Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, University of Queensland

Executive summary

The School of Music has made significant progress in its efforts to re-align with ANU priorities and connect with its various communities following earlier periods of significant disruption. Interviews with ANU staff and prominent community members show that the school makes a strong contribution to the life of the university and the region. Community engagement activity is mutually supported by the development of non-traditional research (NTR) activity through creative works, which pays strong attention to research with First Nations collaborators and provides visibility for the School that enhances the mission of the University. The panel believes the School is well-positioned to maximise these strengths towards realising the ANU's unique mission and national responsibilities.

Adjustments to the School's research activity are needed to support the core mission of the ANU. Focusing on the re-alignment of staffing to support areas of demonstrated student interest and growth as well as research capacity could help achieve this aim. We suggest that further technical and cultural work is needed to develop, incorporate, and recognise non-traditional research outputs (NTROs). This requires tweaks to systems that register and record NTROs and support for people using those systems. More broadly, it requires clarity on the School's part on the distinction between research and professional practice, and confidence on the University's part that this form of research has value and validity.

The review panel recognises that there is strong support from CASS and the ANU executive group, but that at the grass roots there is a perceived disconnect between the school and ANU systems of support. The permanent academic staff seem overwhelmed and would benefit from support with the provision of professional staff in some critical areas such as research management and research technology (recording and mixing for research projects), and for inter-School and College collaborations leading to Linkage or ARC grants. Given the School of Music's strong engagement with community organisations, researchers could (for example) be better supported to develop Linkage grants in the areas of cultural recognition and change, music technology, ethnomusicology, medicine, health and well-being, and musical performance practice and composition.

It is clear that the musical community in Canberra and beyond think highly of School of Music graduates and the role they play in the musical and cultural eco-system. Equally, the quality and engagement of current students is also high. There is much that is positive to continue building on.

The panel suggests it is time to move beyond the formulation of the School as hybrid (part conservatoire and part university). The School is, in reality, already beginning to define a new relationship between itself and the ANU, in which creative musical practices and their tacit, embodied epistemologies can make valuable contributions to knowledge, under the right circumstances. Moving away from binary thinking, and instead reaching for a coming together of value systems will create space for better integration of the School and its parent institution.

The commendations and recommendations that follow are a brief summary. For each of the five Findings the review panel has provided further detail and scope that relate to the commendations and recommendations.

Commendations

- The School of Music is exceptionally engaged with Canberra, the ACT, and beyond, especially in its exemplary approach to engaging First Nations people. This engagement is reflected in the School's research output (specifically in creative works research), its teaching and learning initiatives, its staffing choices and its infrastructure decisions, all of which speak to the School's commitment to consider its responsibilities as integrated with core business.
- The School is now demonstrably in a position to develop its research profile with several senior researchers providing leadership and impact, and a fertile foundation for the further development of creative works research. The School is well-placed to continue building its research profile through its good relationships with various other ANU academic units and in the broader community (e.g. with the Canberra Symphony Orchestra).
- Student satisfaction and staff commitment to the teaching enterprise are both high. Significant efforts have been made to streamline and strengthen curriculum offerings. The Open School provides a strong community interface and there is opportunity to develop its programs further.
- The School of Music is experiencing a period of positive leadership, focussing on the working relationships inside the School. The Canberra community is proud of the School of Music's achievements.

Recommendations

- That the School refresh its vision and mission in the context of a broader discussion of 'who are we?' as researchers, pedagogues, and musicians, and explicitly articulate these strategic directions.
- That the School strengthen its role in fulfilling ANU's mission by further developing its research-intensive profile, with particular attention to the scope of creative works outputs. University systems and support networks will need to work closely with SoM academic staff to achieve this goal. An explicit and transparent research strategy should be disseminated internally.
- That the School further review its curriculum offerings for efficiencies and program coherence, including a stocktake of the overall amount of activity undertaken by the School, including non-teaching related performance engagement, calibrated in relation to its resourcing, capacity and strategic aims.
- That a range of sustainability measures be adopted, including greater engagement with the flexible double degree program, clear pathways to medicine, increasing non-Music elective-taking student numbers from across the University in popular first year courses, diversifying and expanding the School's international connections, and adjusting the entry process to the Bachelor of Music in line with the School of Art and Design's approach.
- That a strategic approach to staffing be adopted in which the twin needs of the School's large performance cohort and the School's creative research endeavour are mutually reinforced. At the same time, the School must continue to seek greater gender parity and diversity in staffing, and address workload concerns and imbalances. A reduction in the number of fixed-term appointments and reliance on casual employees is a key aspect of establishing further stability in the School. The panel suggests that all new appointments (especially in the area of performance studies that is a current pedagogical strength of the school) should have PhD, DMA or equivalent qualifications to ensure a strong development of NTR outputs and activity.

- That the School examine its governance structures to maximise staff awareness of ANU practices, policies and procedures, through models that capitalise on the small number of staff by combining committees where appropriate.

Findings

1. Strengthening our national mission and meeting our unique national responsibilities

The School of Music is playing a critical role in enabling ANU to realise its national mission and the unique responsibilities that are inherent in a research-intensive national university. There is a clear contribution to the cultural health and wellbeing of the nation through their provision of well-prepared graduates in music professions. Community engagement through music research and practice activity places the staff in a strong position to claim excellence in the production of new knowledge through music. Of particular importance is their phenomenal engagement with reconciliation through an inclusive and emancipatory approach to First Nations knowledge through music practice. The School of Music is adopting a comprehensive approach to their work by engaging strongly with other parts of the university with an emphasis on research and educational collaborations in medicine, health, astronomy, literature, and engineering.

The School of Music is to be commended for its regional outreach incorporating genuine commitment to First Nations and Pacifica people, heritage, and performance arts. It demonstrably contributes to the reputation of the university through its outward focus on First Nations engagement and reconciliation, its involvement with the external music bodies, and its engagement with children and families for pipeline into ANU. The School has already demonstrated that there is strong community support for engagement and a mutual willingness to collaborate toward that common goal. This is one example of its broader support of the national arts policy wherein the ACT intention is to be the Arts capital of Australia. Another example is the manner in which the Open School supports the ANU mission through its focus on community education and in the capacity it provides to report engagement activity and outcomes to the federal govt through the ACT arts act.

The panel also sees opportunities to strengthen its contribution to ANU's sense of national mission, and support its research, teaching, and outreach through the development of a refreshed vision and mission statement that clearly defines what the SoM is for. Using the collective expertise and knowledge of current academic staff, the School could benefit from a series of strategic sessions to focus on collective 'visioning' so that all staff have clarity over the refreshed purpose of the school.

An important facet of this development will require that the School focus on the development of research excellence in performance and composition. This will need an internal audit of research strengths, and alignment of current research hubs towards established areas of strength and support for emerging areas. It will also involve a discussion of professional musical practices that are distinct from research but have high community impact. The panel suggests that the School utilise its current strength in working with local collaborators toward this goal, and move increasingly towards an extended reach with collaborations with international scholars. Another opportunity for the School lies in expanding its interfaculty research engagement with science, engineering, medicine and health, languages, and cultural studies. CASS seed funding could be integral to promoting the value of this form of engaged work.

2. Conducting research that transforms society and creates national capability

The School of Music has demonstrated a high level of achievement and success in various music research disciplines, while steadily building research quality and quantity over time. It exhibits notable strengths in Indigenous Australian music, music technology, ethnomusicology, popular music studies, and creative works research. The School pursues a broad and ambitious range of research projects, initiatives, and themes, from a small staffing base.

In this context, the panel commends the School for its focus on Indigenous Australian music research with impact and engagement. Cultural knowledge is a national priority and has the capacity to positively influence policy development in Canberra. This research has the potential to further inform and participate in ANU's Indigenous strategy and Reconciliation Action Plan, and to provide models and learnings for other music and/or academic institutions to employ in developing their own Indigenous research programs.

The panel also notes the work of the School's research high achievers. While quality research outcomes are evident across the School, projects such as Dr Bonnie McConnell's CHIME and Dr Johannes Mulder's Sound Level Measurement Monitoring and Christopher Sainsbury's Ngarra-Burria are exemplars of projects with international and/or national impact.

Opportunity arises for the School in emerging research partnerships across ANU and beyond. The potential for further growth in collaborations with areas such as Arts, the Sciences, and Medicine is clear. The School has significant potential to effectively partner with external organisations (for example, the Canberra Symphony Orchestra) in projects and funding applications (such as ARC Linkages).

The panel, however, sees further research uplift as crucial to the next phase of the ANU School of Music's development. The School is embedded within a research-intensive Group of 8 university committed to research excellence at an international level. As a former conservatorium-style School of Music that transitioned into the university sector in the 1990s, it is to be expected that the attendant cultural change would present challenges, require patience, and benefit from mutual understanding. Both the School and the University have made significant progress in this adaptive challenge, with the School to be commended for its efforts in publicly engaged research, including its focus on outreach at the local and regional level, and for its increasingly international aims and outlook. Its focus on engaged forms of research necessitates network- and relationship-building, a time- and energy-consuming process that the School has undertaken with diligence. At the same time, the University has invested in and enhanced its systems and processes to recognise and register a broader range of research outputs, including non-traditional research through creative works. Various aspects of the relationship between School and University priorities require calibration, which the detailed suggestions below seek to support.

The panel advises the School to develop a comprehensive, ambitious, and internally disseminated research strategy that has full participation in future national research excellence assessment exercises as one of its key goals. The strategy must focus on pipeline, capacity building, and development of staff research capability, especially in the area of music performance and creative works research.

As part of this process, the School must clarify the scope of its research activity with CASS, contextualised within broader research priorities at ANU. Agreement and consensus are required as to what counts as research versus what is considered professional practice. A contextualised statement of what 'excellence' means in music research would benefit researchers working in non-traditional formats, with a clear delineation made between research and outreach or engagement activity.

Clearer scope of activity will enable the School to identify, support, and promote the highest quality non-traditional research possible. At the same time, acknowledging the unique value proposition of a School of Music, the University must ensure that professional practice is also recognised for the value it brings to ANU in terms of public engagement – locally, nationally, and internationally – and is calibrated within workload modelling.

In order to improve research quality and quantity across all staffing cohorts, School of Music academics involved with creative works research should receive mentoring or other support in connecting their creative work to ANU research priorities and systems. The university has created systems to record non-traditional research outputs, but further technical and cultural work is needed to translate that system capability into a meaningful interface for researchers. Creative works researchers would also benefit from the articulation of minimum standards and metrics for achievement in their disciplines. Current staff without higher research qualifications should be supported in obtaining a PhD (or DMA), and future hires should be required to have a higher degree in a relevant discipline.

The panel noted opportunity for academic staff be better supported in identifying grant opportunities and developing applications, beginning with greater awareness of CASS seed funding and other internal schemes. Staff should be expected to register all category 2 and 3 research income with the university, including Australia Council funding and other arts or community grant income, with effective support from the College or central research offices. Broader goals need to include developing track records for large-scale grant applications.

In terms of internal research groupings within the unit, the School's research hubs need refinement of focus and alignment with broader CASS and ANU research priorities. These hubs must be inclusive of all research activity and achievement in the School, with the diversity of the School's achievements celebrated. Better integration and narrative description of the School's research activity will enhance the research environment, supporting future ARC applications.

These aims and objectives will benefit from the appointment of a research manager, perhaps in a joint arrangement with the School of Art and Design. This suggestion should be considered in the broader context of increased research governance and collaboration with the School of Art and Design.

3. Delivering a student experience equal to the world's best

The ANU School of Music has a reputation for teaching excellence. This review confirmed that high levels of student satisfaction remain a commendable feature of its teaching and learning profile: positive experiences were reported by all student cohorts encountered during the review site visit. Students enjoy committed and dedicated teaching staff and supervisors, very good facilities, and a rich variety of experiences, workshops, and seminars. This success is particularly impressive in the context of small continuing FTE academic staff numbers and speaks to the loyalty and dedication of the School's teaching staff, along with the support provided by professional staff in both student administration and operations.

In this context, the School is commended for its expansive view of music education that embraces its position in a Group of 8 university, particularly through the adoption of flexible double degree options. The School's curriculum choices accord with its values around equity, inclusion, and connection, and the ongoing commitment to embedding Indigenous perspectives is commended.

The School has in recent years undertaken a successful course rationalisation and streamlining process, achieving a total number of courses within the target set by CASS. The panel encourages the School to resist the temptation to add new courses without removing other courses if it is to maintain the current lean program shape. While rationalising the overall number of courses, the growth in music technology as an area of study and scholarship has been a notable development, which should be built further upon.

The panel notes the vital role the School's performance program plays in the cultural life of the University and broader community. The University is also commended for its efforts to support and sustain performance training. Performance majors comprise the majority of students in the Bachelor of Music, reflecting school-leaver interest in performance as well as the fundamental importance of practical music-making in the ecology of music education. These students are fortunate to enjoy a range of high-quality studios, performance venues, and instrument collections at the School's disposal.

In terms of future directions, the School of Music should continue asserting its identity as a creative, dynamic, and engaged music education provider that capitalises on its on-campus position within a Group of 8 university. In doing so, it needs to carefully calibrate its plans in relation to its resources. While course rationalisation has been successfully undertaken in recent years, the true quantum of activity in a School of Music can be difficult to ascertain and is often greater than the number of courses would suggest. At the same time, course rationalisation at the School appears to have been primarily driven by external pressures. There is a need for a more integrated approach to curriculum reform, driven internally and informed by strategic alignment with ANU priorities and changing student demand. This is a difficult process that requires time for consultation and development, which is in tension with the urgency created by unsustainable staff teaching workloads.

Within this context, the panel recommends that a stocktake of the current extent of performance activity across the School and mapping of that activity to specific course learning activity and assessment outcomes be undertaken. Those activities that fall outside of course requirements need to be examined for strategic fit against resourcing and student load considerations.

While course numbers overall are within target, there is opportunity for greater coherence and efficiency through further renewal. The School may wish to review the pros and cons of retaining (the current number of) majors within the Bachelor of Music, versus moving away from named majors and instead constructing a common core that leaves elective space for specialisations.

If majors are retained, the number and structure of available majors in the Bachelor of Music should undergo a focused review to consider efficiencies in the number of pathways and to increase coherence of those pathways. The panel is not recommending specific changes, as this is the responsibility of the School to self-determine in coordination with CASS. As an example of pathway coherence and consolidation, however, opportunities might be found by considering the relationship between student practitioners of contemporary music and the popular musicology offerings, and by potentially relocating contemporary music practical training out of the jazz curriculum. These components might then be incorporated into a re-designed contemporary/popular music and technology major. In doing this, it would be important to acknowledge and sustain the success of technology courses in attracting student interest. In considering such changes, where appropriate, group pedagogy should be encouraged, potentially in the delivery of practical popular music training.

In considering entry into the (single degree) Bachelor of Music, the panel supports the School's intention to move away from an ATAR requirement, and instead initiate a portfolio, audition, and interview requirement based on the model already in place in the School of Art and Design.

In terms of broader student recruitment, the School recommends further promotion of the flexible double degree options as well as the development of more specific pathways into programs, especially with Medicine. Similarly, the School should focus on increasing international student numbers, including through strategically targeted course offerings at the postgraduate level, possibly in collaboration with other units at ANU.

The School, CASS and University should also work together to enable and promote greater enrolment of non-music students in large first- and second-year courses in music. Music courses in technology and popular music, among others, are likely to be attractive as electives to a significant number of students in other programs at ANU.

Finally, given Llewellyn Hall's status as one of the most important pieces of teaching infrastructure for music students, the panel recommends that the School (with CASS support) initiate discussions with Timetabling around Llewellyn Hall usage. Acknowledging the complexity and constraints for large class delivery on the ANU campus, as a purpose-built facility for music, there needs to be a strategy to allow for pedagogically appropriate teaching activity for a modest number of ensemble and groups in Llewellyn Hall.

4. Being a standard-bearer for equity and inclusion

The ethos of kindness at the heart of the School of Music is evidenced in its commitment to social equity and inclusion. Given its relatively small size, the School nonetheless boasts a number of initiatives that demonstrate this ethos in action.

The panel commends the School of Music on its endeavours to address its historic gender imbalance. Over the past decade the School has appointed research-active women scholars to permanent posts in the fields of music technology, ethnomusicology, and jazz studies. The ratio of women to men in the fields of classical and jazz performance is nearly balanced, though this is negatively affected by the uncertainty attendant with fixed-term and casual contracts. The School administration recognises this disparity and projects a five-year period for recalibration.

There are several projects focused on and led by women through the School of Music that are deserving of special mention:

- In collaboration with the Gender Institute, the School of Music has developed discrete projects such as the Women in Creative Arts Conference, the Songs for Loud Women project, and the Community Health Intervention through Music (CHIME) project for perinatal mental health.
- The Women in Music program, a multi-faceted, year-long mentoring program that pairs young women performers with professional women artists, is a clear enactment of the School's commitment to social justice and positive cultural change.

In its Reconciliation Action Plan the ANU states its intention 'to transform Australian society with impactful, collaborative, Indigenous-led research and policy development'. The School of Music is furthering this aim both internally, in its structures of governance (for example the formation of the Indigenous Matters Committee, an integrated group offering support for university applicants, students, staff, and local musicians); and externally, in the public-facing activities valued across university disciplines and by the wider Canberra community. The panel commends these initiatives, which reflect a clear commitment to supporting and furthering the interests of First Nations Peoples and communities:

- Ngarra Burria: First Peoples Composers program was initiated eight years ago to afford First Peoples composers the opportunity to develop new skills and industry knowledge. The program was the first of its kind and is now being replicated around the country.
- The Yil Lull Indigenous recording studio was established in 2021 to enable local and regional First Nations musicians to document and record their creative work. Now directed by Will Kepa (Torres Strait Islander), the studio is host to the Australia Council Space to Create program, an independent venture that also involves several members of the School. Under Will Kepa's leadership Yil Lull is on course to become a productive and successful recording label.
- Recognising that one-off collaborations are no longer valid, Indigenous composers' music is programmed on school recitals and incorporated into the school's jazz courses. The School offers an optional course in the study of First Nations' music and culture, devised and taught by First Nations musicians, and the Open School offers extension courses for First Nations musicians and members of the wider communities.
- The Wamburang Women's Choir, a choir for First Nations women of all ages and levels of experience run by the Open School, is a supportive and creative space for music-making in the Ngannawal language.

Given the positive impact of these initiatives, and to ensure their continued success, the panel recommends that the School continue to seek greater gender parity and diversity in contracted and continuing appointments. It must ensure greater representation of women, non-binary staff, and staff of colour on the School's administrative and academic committees, both through membership and in leadership roles.

The panel also recommends that the research and creative work being undertaken collaboratively by the School of Music and First Nations musicians be fully recognised as research outputs. This will not only strengthen the research environment of the School but model these transformative initiatives for universities across Australia.

To support this goal, the panel recommends that CASS alleviate the work imbalance placed on First Nations staff in operating and facilitating these initiatives by creating new pathways to secure employment for First Nations staff, particularly those working in community, industry, and collaborative spaces. This will facilitate growth in the School's cohort of First Nations students. The School will enable greater Indigenous student access if it adopts the admissions policy currently in place at the School of Art and Design, removing the ATAR requirements and introducing an application process based on audition, interview, and portfolio submission.

5. Leadership, governance, organisation and financial sustainability

The school has already undertaken decisive steps towards course sustainability through the reduction of small enrolment courses. The staffing model of the School supports some quite specific subject choices. For instance, the majority of staff in the performance area are on short fixed-term or casual contracts, which is in contrast to the student body, the majority of whom are undertaking the performance degree. In this particular area we note some instability due to the staffing model. However, we recognise that the school is still in a development phase following on from its complex history.

Despite a relatively small student body we would urge that the School continually look at the role of small enrolment units to achieve core completions and still provide a breadth of inquiry for students involved in the different degree programs. It is our view that the School has worked doggedly to make as much of its curriculum as it can given the tight resources that they have. Limited financial data was provided for the review panel, but the panel understands that the financial model is an expenditure budget mostly relating to salaries. Fixed term roles have been used to stabilise teaching – but new budget directives, a new EA, and Fair Work Australia directives will require the School and Dean to consider the best staffing models to achieve SoM aims following a principle that effective staffing follows curriculum currency.

In this context, the panel commends the leadership of the School for its ability to manage well, both up and down, with the University executive and with colleagues within the School. The current leadership exhibit strong institutional knowledge and understanding of the arts sector, while also deploying expertise in emotional intelligence. This has enabled a nuanced and subtle approach to nurturing a positive atmosphere in the School. Outcomes of this approach include the advent of a consensus approach to governance and decision making, ensuring that colleagues have agency in decisions regarding the academic focus of the school, and that all School meetings are appreciated. The School has also kept a clear focus on the leadership development of mid-career colleagues, creating a pipeline of possible future leaders.

In order to achieve the aims of the School of Music attaining research intensive status, there needs to be a clearer articulation of the roles within the organisational structure. Conversations with academic staff show that many people are uncertain of the structure and supports that are available to them within the larger university environment. Relatedly, the School should reassess its committee structures. Given the small number of permanent staff, we suggest that some of the required committees be joined, and that the agendas be tight, in order to optimise staff time and to save wear and tear.

The physical location of professional staff is a concern to members of the School (and to some professional staff as well). The reasons for the co-location of the professional staff could be better articulated, and the benefits to the School of the shared knowledge that comes with co-location could be more clearly emphasised.

We believe that the School could be better supported through the development of a targeted employment strategy that focuses on the curriculum requirements of the School. To progress research intensive status, we recommend that some current casual or fixed-term roles be converted to permanent roles if that staff member has demonstrated research capability through NTRO or traditional research submissions and Higher Degree Qualifications. All future hires should be in possession of a doctorate in music.

Although not a recommendation, the review panel would ask that consideration be given to the appointment of a research manager for the School, and the addition of a .5 technical support officer to enable growth in research and grant seeking. A joint Level E appointment with Medicine was suggested to us, and we believe this could become a catalyst for senior inter-disciplinary research and its attendant development of research students. In the context of casual conversions or the provision of new substantive roles such as Level Bs with Higher degree, in the context of performance, musicology, voice, and instrumental tuition provision, we would suggest a staged approach over the next several years, which supports the research environment needed for ARC.

The School has a single person looking after development through philanthropy. In conversation the focus of the work is towards gifts in will. This is a long-term support strategy but does not make a substantial immediate effect. We suggest also that this area of work be reconsidered, with additional focus to support current students and research activity.

Conclusion

The Review Panel would like to thank ANU for the opportunity to participate in the development of the School of Music. We firmly believe that a comprehensive music education based on creative research practice has a place in a research-intensive university. The School of Music provides a critical interface between the University and the community at large and enjoys a deserved, national, reputation for its work with First Nations people. It has created a learning environment that is attractive to students, including those who are combining music with other disciplines, enabling those students to experience deep cultural knowledge through music making and composition. The Review Panel was impressed by the dedication of all staff, academic and professional, to the aims of the School and the University. Senior research staff are providing outputs of significance and impact that enjoy strong collaborations with other researchers at ANU and beyond. Performance and composition staff provide creative role models to students that encourage the next generation of professional musicians. The ANU School of Music has made significant progress in recent years, building relationships and restoring stability. It is well-positioned to work with its internal and external partners toward even greater alignment with both the needs of ANU and the many stakeholders and communities that it serves.