

Different streets, different beats?

Reading the map of post-secondary options in music

Helen Lancaster

The landscape of post-secondary music education and training is changing dramatically across the world. In Australia, the lines between vocational conservatorium training and comprehensive university education have blurred, a consequence of the 1988 Higher Education Review (Dawkins 1988) which placed all conservatoria inside the university sector. Concurrent expansion among private institutions, most now offering university awards, and changes in the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) sector, have shifted the boundaries even more.

Any expectation that all professional music education and training should occur within the university sector is impractical.

Current options for post-secondary music are so diverse that resource-strapped universities are not well-placed to address them all. Nor should they expect to do so.

Broadening the spectrum of available options has been the parallel development of Vocational Education and Training (VET) packages in the TAFE sector; a framework of certificates and diplomas intending to facilitate mobility within and between sectors, and link directly to industry.

Such developments position Australian music institutions ahead of their European forerunners in potential for articulation. Options for music students in Australia are diverse, the framework allowing progression from secondary education to industry in a variety of permutations. It is technically possible for school students to commence units from VET or university awards whilst still at school, promoting ease of transition (and recruitment!). A few universities offer articulation for selected senior students, and schools like Ballarat Grammar School have seized the opportunity to offer VET awards.

The framework also makes it possible for students to articulate from TAFE into university; and some universities have become dual-sector providers. Seamless

articulation from school to profession is possible, but few institutions have noticed. Under the Australian Qualifications Framework, the Federal Government has the power to mandate articulation between the sectors, although it has yet to do so. Hopefully the UK government mandates on access and graduate placement (HEFCE 2000) will not inspire similar directives here.

Specialisation or diversity?

The results of the recent Australian Music Centre survey, sent to all institutions offering awards in music at a post-secondary level, indicate that trends which were emerging in 2002 have since been cemented. In the earlier survey

(published in *Sounds Australian* no. 60, 2002), a small percentage of music institutions offered explicit degrees, including Bachelor of Contemporary Music, Popular Music and Music Theatre which target

highly focussed populations (contemporary elitism?). Other institutions increased pathways within the Bachelor of Music (B.Mus.) degree, and a further assortment of combined and double degrees. The trend is substantiated by the figures: in 2004, 90% of universities reported offering collaborative awards encompassing other disciplines.

The current collection of awards is diverse. The 2002 survey catalogued 103 music awards in various permutations, including 22 variations on a B.Mus. theme, and 4 VET awards. The recent survey confirms that university awards have increased by 65%. An escalation of 100% among the VET awards offered in the university sector correlates to an increase of 150% in the number of universities operating as dual-sector providers.

Because TAFE institutions were not surveyed in 2002, there is no comparison available for that sector. Currently, the range of 20 packages available includes Certificates, Diplomas

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and Advanced Diplomas, with specialisations in Music Industry (Business/Technical Production), Composition, Entertainment and various genres of Performance. Correlations between VET packages and some university awards are clear.

Although the extended coverage of the 2004 survey might explain the increased options, there are significant differences among the new university awards. For example, the number of non-VET Certificate programs available in universities has increased by 500%, Graduate Certificates have doubled, Diploma programs have tripled, and Doctoral programs have doubled in number and diversity. There has also been an increase of more than 50% in the range of Masters programs. These figures correspond to current emphasis on attracting postgraduate and professional development enrolments which provide additional income.

Given the increase in postgraduate awards, it is curious that only one university revealed an increase of more than 3% in postgraduate students as a percentage of the total enrolment. More notable was the finding that many institutions rely heavily on their own graduates to fill postgraduate places, half reporting at least 48% enrolment on that basis, the range of figures varying from 0-89% dependency.

Significant among current university awards are a suite of combined undergraduate degrees comprising creative arts, education, commerce, law, languages, psychology and science. These are in addition to the variations within the B.Mus. degree, all of which existed in the earlier survey, although not in the same number of locations. To traditional specialisations of performance, composition, musicology and ethnomusicology have been added associate artist, church music, contemporary music, digital media, music language, music technology, music theatre, music therapy, recording production, singer/songwriter, and studio teaching. Further, the number of programs in Creative Arts has doubled, and undergraduate awards claiming to cater for a new generation of musicians, including Creative Industries and Electronic Arts, have increased. Similar diversity exists among graduate certificates, graduate diplomas, and masters degrees.

This range of programs is reflective of parallel trends in Europe, where very few traditional conservatory-style institutions remain. Most now offer some diversity, although not to the extent as in

Australia. The trend away from traditional training has been welcomed even among more conservative institutions, although the rush of diversity has been shadowed by debate on the need for 'performance

gymnasiums' to allow students to concentrate on developing performance skills to the exclusion of all academic diversions, an argument reminiscent of the traditional conservatorium (AEC 2002).

Articulation

With industry-based awards inside and outside universities, are we re-inventing the dual sector which the Higher Education Review of 1988 sought to abolish? To the extent that the former Colleges of Advanced Education (CAEs, eliminated by the 1988 Review) were focussed on specific industry training, the suggestion has merit. Some university music schools increasingly resemble that model more than they do academic institutions. Moreover, as was the case with CAEs, most institutions have yet to applaud individual differences and accept the potential for articulation between the sectors.

Indeed, despite the framework of Music Industry Training Packages, there remains a degree of scepticism preventing realisation of its full potential. Among the survey responses was one university's remark that "none of their [TAFE] graduates would normally be qualified to enter a B.Mus. degree." Without qualification, such comment remains unhelpful. Because the Australian Qualification Framework equates VET Diplomas with 3 semesters of university study, and Advanced Diplomas with 4 semesters, TAFE graduates should qualify for relevant university programs. With more cross-sectoral acceptance and collaboration, articulation offers potential across all sectors. It also represents a significant opportunity for students seeking alternatives to the normal pathway of matriculation

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followed by tertiary placement.

There are precedents for articulation: the Advanced Diploma offered at Box Hill Institute is recognised by Queensland University of Technology (QUT) for entry into a suite of postgraduate diplomas with related specialisations. With no undergraduate music program, Deakin University recognises the same award as equivalent for entry into a teaching degree. Southern Cross University guarantees 3 semesters' credit for students holding the VET Advanced Diploma, typically accepting students into second year of the degree in Contemporary Music. With pressure on university places, some prospective tertiary students are seeking TAFE alternatives (Perry 2004), and it is not inconceivable that this trend might be experienced (even encouraged) in music.

Universities offering VET programs are challenged to account for competency-based assessment in parallel with tertiary assessment. With added programs and delivery modes, universities are blurring the lines between vocational training and education, some of them more than others. For intending students, it is both a nimity and a nightmare. They should familiarise themselves with all details, including modes of delivery and assessment, elements of diversity or specialisation and potential professional pathways.

Technology

With increasing application of technology across disciplines, it is not surprising to see a dramatic change in delivery systems. In the earlier survey fewer than half the institutions provided compulsory training in technology, and access to computer hardware and software was variable. Now, all institutions except one have increased access, and compulsory training for students is now the norm. Flexible delivery on-campus is common; with web-based tutorial enhancement and assessment available in most universities.

Given this investment, it is surprising that few institutions have exploited it further. The expansion of web-based access over multiple locations remains the exception rather than the norm. One



Box Hill Institute ProTools training studio

institution has rushed in, developing multiple locations including cyberspace (Whateley 2000), but others with long-established distance education continue to provide course notes in hard copy, audio and video tapes, and in one case, on CD-ROM. For some students, off-campus study is the only viable option. Comments from all sectors emphasised the importance of increased access, some noting that students are less likely to cancel enrolment if flexible delivery is available when on-campus study is no longer feasible.

The notion that practical tuition is not viable via distance education is being challenged by an innovation outside the tertiary sector. Mark Walton has confronted concerns about one-to-one tuition with his quest to bring instrumental lessons via videoconference facilities to regional students, negotiating a successful collaboration between government, industry and institution, now operating as the Sydney Conservatorium VideoLink program, providing tuition to pre-tertiary students in regional New South Wales. A precursor, perhaps?

Collaboration

Collaborations of all kinds represent

the most sweeping trend affecting institutions in all sectors: across artforms, disciplines, cultures, institutions and external organisations. For some, it means economic survival, for others it suggests exciting potential to benefit students and build programs. For example, acknowledging the essential relationship between music and dance, Trinity College of Music has merged with the renowned Laban Centre offering collaborative programs between the two artforms.

In response to the inevitability that future musicians will face a different profession, some institutions cling to traditional training as the foundation for any likelihood, whilst others trust that collaborative practice will produce graduates with appropriate flexibility.

Many institutions rush to reproduce the work of the Guildhall School of Music in cross-cultural (Hendrickse 2002) and community music (Gregory 2001), but few acknowledge the bold minority which has discarded the conservatorium tradition in Australia.

For example, in 2002 the University of Wollongong took the logical step of using its strengths in Creative Arts to replace all former awards with a Bachelor of Creative Arts in Sound – Composition

and Production, and in Performance. The latter, whilst hinting at the traditional, also includes study in Drama. The Bachelor of Creative Industries at QUT challenges students "to work across boundaries". Each option depends on collaborative practice, offering alternatives to awards with an exclusive focus.

Research

The survey confirmed a slowing interest in researching Western musicology, current approaches being aligned to applied science, humanities and creative practice. In the 2002 survey, 19% of institutions indicated that their universities supported creative practice as research. The recent survey confirms that all institutions now acknowledge the field, clearly confident of their respective university's support, despite the government's continuing failure to

concede. Collaboration across disciplines is one way in which the dilemma is confronted, and such programs as the Master of Applied Science (Performing Arts) at Sydney Conservatorium might well provide a way of matching government formula with artistic criteria.

Graduate Destinations

Programs incorporating industry practice provide an excellent opportunity for students to appreciate the demands of the work they aspire to do (Rogers 2002), yet the survey results list relatively few significant interactions with professional organisations.

Recent policy implications suggest that the Australian Government may yet challenge providers in ways similar to that of UK government policy requiring that 'more than 75% of graduates are working primarily in professional music performance, as performers of music, within five years of graduating from the institution' if the institution is to retain the premium level of funding (HEFCE 2000). This policy has caused a dramatic reduction in piano students at the Royal Academy of Music (RAM), and emphasis on finding bassoonists to address a Europe-wide shortage (Price 2002). Clearly, the policy suggests a narrow view of music graduates, and the RAM response addresses the traditional market, but the bottom line has institutions scrambling for solutions, not to mention a definition of 'professional music performance'.

Resourcing change

Ultimately, all Australian sectors are bound by economic factors, which allow progress or limit choices. It is worth

considering an institution's ability to effectively resource programs, especially if they rely on expensive infrastructure. Only one respondent to the survey indicated "no effect" in relation to funding issues. The university figures are dramatic: 42% have reduced programs, 63% have reduced staff, 75% need to attract fee-paying students, 79% have

difficulty maintaining resources, and 88% now need to attract non-government funding. The TAFE sector is affected by reduced staffing (67%) and reduction in

programs (57%). Not surprisingly, private providers emphasise fee-paying enrolments (67%).

On the need to resource development, one university respondent wrote "Couple this with the dwindling funding for higher education and you have a desperate scenario". Without questioning the validity of this claim, it is interesting that no private institutions reported economic challenges, instead noting those related to meeting student needs, finding ways of addressing a population dispersed over a large area, and maintaining professional excellence. None of the private providers reported a reduction in programs, which may imply a more commercial tendency to offer only that which is viable.

What of viability for students? Pressure to fill places makes institutions susceptible to accepting students who may not achieve their professional goals (Kingsbury 1998). Students need to research preferences thoroughly, cognisant of the issues which influence institutional decision making, many of them covered in this edition.

With 100 questions in the survey, it is impossible to address them all in this journal. However, the primary issues are highlighted, and the data are available for those who seek the detail. The survey was designed to provoke thought and provide information for prospective students and music institutions, and there is a wealth of information in the

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results. Hopefully among potential postgraduate students there will be some who choose to further research questions emerging from the data.

That there were 49 institutions to approach for this survey implies an enormous variety of options available to prospective students. But it places a greater responsibility on students to search outside the square and choose wisely, aware of the implications for their professional future, understanding the issues which surround post-secondary music training, and recognising the challenges being faced by the providers. In that context, the decision will be better informed.

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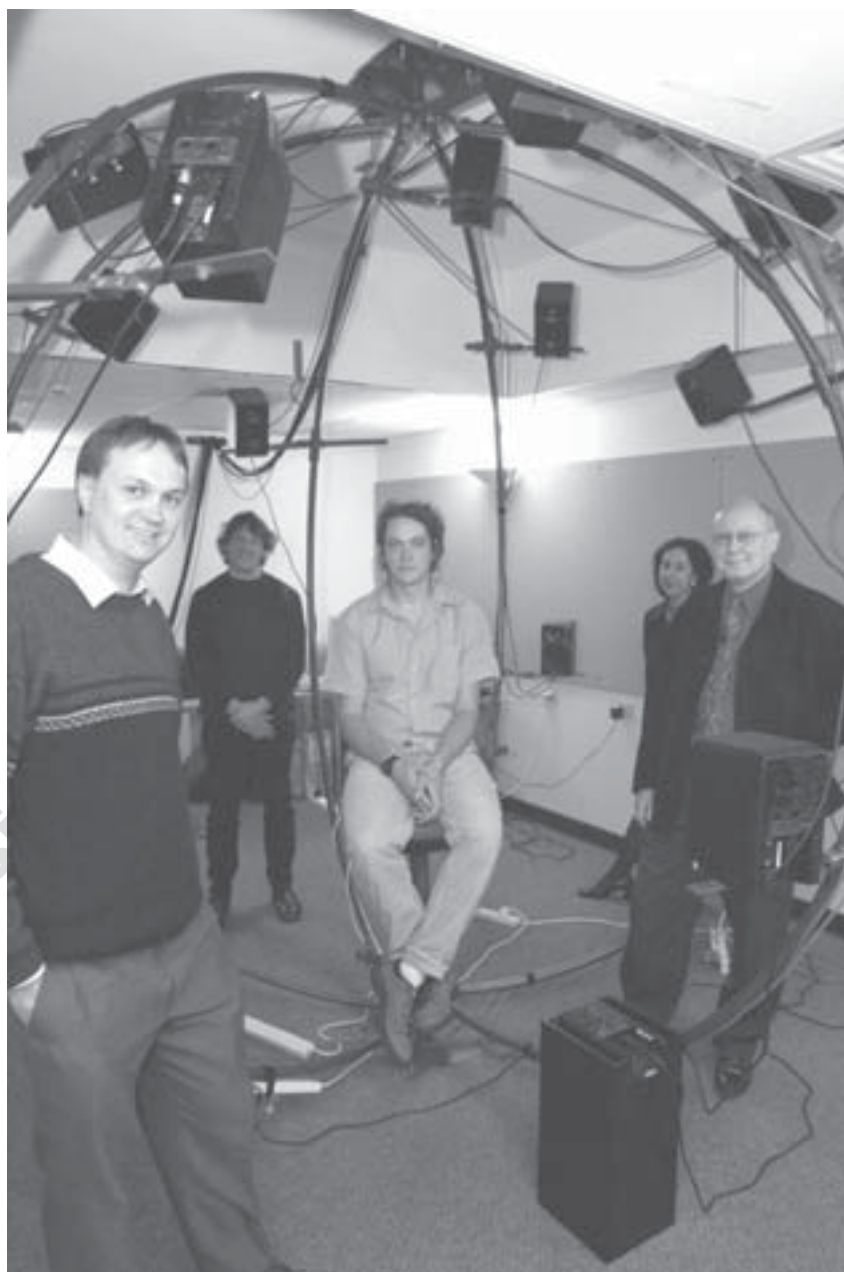
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CHESS represents a collaborative effort between experts at the University of Wollongong. Pictured from left are Associate Professor Ian Burnett from Informatics, sculptor Didier Balez, PhD student Guillaume Potard, Dr Lorier Lockyer, Associate Director of the Digital Media Centre and Associate Professor Stephen Ingham from the Faculty of Creative Arts (Coordinator of the Sound Composition and Production Program in the School of Music and Drama).

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