

# Regional conservatoriums responding to socio-educational disadvantage in regional, rural and remote schools

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## Abstract

This paper outlines the socio-educational contexts within which NSW regional conservatoriums operate, thereby demonstrating the breadth of their operations, as well as their existing relationships with, and activity in, rural, regional and remote (RRR) schools. The paper elucidates the socio-educational disadvantage of the schools within which conservatoriums work through an analysis of the Index of Community Social and Educational Advantage (ICSEA) of these schools. Further, the expanse of the areas of the state receiving regional conservatorium programs is highlighted, and the cost of delivering to these distances is noted.

The paper aligns regional conservatorium programs and activities with the focus areas and recommendations of three recent state and national government reports/strategies around RRR Education. In so doing, the capacity and potential of regional conservatoriums to contribute to the recommendations contained within these documents is demonstrated.

The paper concludes that regional conservatoriums are in a unique position to broaden access and increase equity for RRR school students through a variety of programs and activities, and therefore aid in addressing disadvantage for those students marginalised by distance from urban centres. The paper suggests that regional conservatoriums' response to challenges of RRR education might serve as an exemplar for other educational organisations.

**Key words:** regional music education; educational disadvantage; regional conservatoriums

## Introduction

Approximately 25% of Australia's school-aged students are enrolled in schools outside of metropolitan areas, and the educational disadvantage of these students has been the subject of investigation, report and strategy in recent years at both state and national levels (Halsey, 2018; NSW Department of Education and Communities [DEC], 2013; NSW Department of Education [DoE], 2021). Australian educators are challenged to provide high quality education in rural, regional and remote (RRR) communities, where it is difficult to attract and retain qualified teachers; where there are less positive attitudes to schooling; where access to education services is limited; where there may be disconnect with the curriculum; and where achievement is notably lower. These issues are considered to contribute

to student disadvantage and lower attainment levels for RRR students (Lamb et al., 2014). This paper outlines and describes the work of regional conservatoriums within the state of NSW, and their real and potential contributions to alleviating this disadvantage.

The Association of New South Wales Regional Conservatoriums (ANSWRC) is the peak body for 17 community-owned and operated conservatoriums, scattered across the state of NSW. Each conservatorium operates autonomously and is usually the principal provider of music education and performance in its respective region. The conservatoriums work within an agreement with the NSW Department of Education whereby they receive partial funding, and increasingly work as third-party providers of school-based music education. Most commonly this is through

curriculum support in the alignment of instrument, vocal and ensemble tuition, but can include the provision of classroom music itself (Sattler, 2016). As a network of music education hubs, this is the only model currently operating in Australia. Klopfer (2009) highlighted the fundamental aim of regional conservatoriums as: “attempting to provide equity for students in remote areas having the same access to music education opportunities, as do their city counterparts” (p. 36).

## Key challenges identified in government documents

Three government documents produced and released over recent years reflect an increasing awareness of and concern for the educational disadvantage of students and teachers in RRR areas of both NSW and greater Australia.

The first of these documents, commissioned by the Australian Government in 2017, the *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education* (Halsey, 2018) investigated challenges facing RRR education and proposed solutions through 11 key recommendations and associated actions to bridge the urban-rural divide. Recommendations encompassed areas of curriculum and assessment; teachers and educational leaders; improving post school pathways and opportunities; ICT; philanthropy and entrepreneurship; arrangements for schooling; and building the capacities of RRR communities.

The key aims of the NSW DEC’s (2013) *Blueprint for Action* were to implement effective actions in four focus areas: quality early childhood education; great teachers and school leaders; curriculum access for all; and effective partnerships and connections, with the state government committing over \$80 million across four years to these ends. Evaluations of the aims utilising data up to 2017 found that enrolments of Aboriginal children in community preschools increased by 45%; gaps in NAPLAN scores between RRR and metropolitan students remained; there was no meaningful impact on teacher retention from the 50% rental subsidy;

and Aurora College has provided an important opportunity for gifted and talented students.

The recently-released *Rural and Remote Education Strategy 2021-2024* (DoE, 2021) identifies four key areas for improved outcomes in RRR education, they being People (high quality educators); Practice (broad curriculum to engage learners); Participation (strong connections with community); and Partnerships (to increase and improve post-schooling opportunities).

This paper responds to the challenges and recommendations identified in these documents and proposes that in the state of New South Wales, regional conservatoriums are in a unique position to contribute to the recommendations and focus areas of these government documents, thereby aiding in addressing issues of equity and access for RRR students.

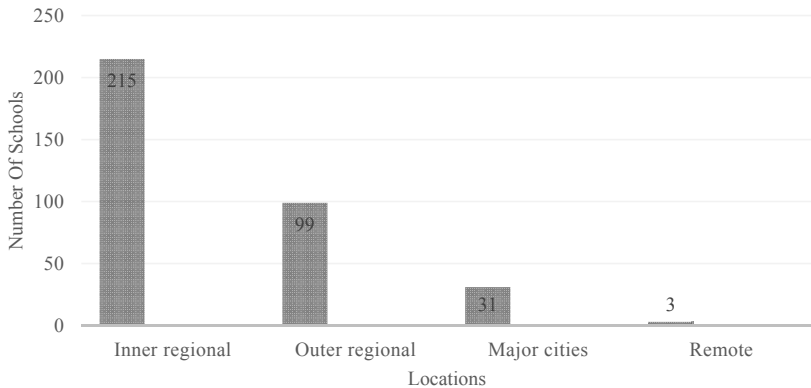
## Schools within which regional conservatoriums operate

Data representing 16 of the 17 NSW regional conservatoriums were collected and analysed to illustrate the outreach of the conservatoriums. In Semester One, 2021, the 16 conservatoriums were delivering programs in 347 (11%) of NSW’s 3,107 schools.

## Locations

NSW school locations are described according to the Accessibility and Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Schools within which regional conservatoriums deliver programs lie in areas designated as major cities, inner regional, outer regional, and remote. Regional conservatoriums do not deliver programs into schools located in areas designated “very remote” in 2021. The proportion of schools lying within each of these areas is shown in Figure 1.

Since schools located in Major Cities (for example, those within the Wollongong and Central Coast areas) lie outside of areas targeted within the *Rural and Remote Strategy (2021-2024)*, data pertaining to these 31 schools will be excluded

**Figure 1: School locations by ARIA classification.**

from the remainder of this discussion. However, it is important to note that for the greater ANSWRC, the inclusion of schools from locations across such diverse geographical areas necessitates great breadth of skill, experience, expertise and management, with no two conservatoriums operating within equivalent contexts.

The following analysis considers data pertaining to 316 schools within which regional conservatoriums work and which lie in areas designated Inner Regional, Outer Regional and Remote.

### Distance of schools from conservatoriums

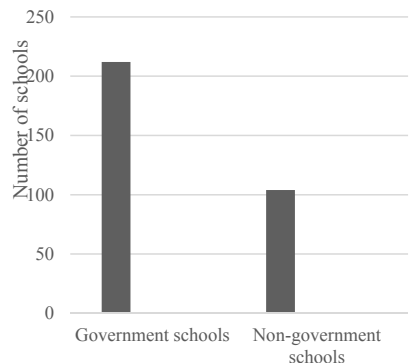
The conservatoriums are located within regional cities and town across the state of NSW. Conservatorium staff travel to schools across their regions to provide weekly instrumental and or vocal lessons, classroom programs and ensemble programs on school sites. Distances from conservatoriums to the schools within which they teach range from 500 metres to 278 kilometres. A total of 15,024 kilometres may be travelled each week by conservatorium staff, with the 316 schools lying an average of 43 kilometres from their partner conservatoriums.

Transporting teaching staff to schools is very costly for conservatoriums, which must either

provide transport or recompense costs incurred by staff, as well as allowing and paying travel time. Utilising the Australian Taxation Office "Cents per kilometre method" (Australian Taxation, Office, 2021), the aggregate cost of transporting teaching staff to 316 schools each week would be \$10,817, or \$31 per school, based on the average of 43 kilometres. Across a forty-week teaching year, this cost is greater than \$430,000.

### School type

Approximately two-thirds of the state's schools are government schools, with one-third of NSW's

**Figure 2: School systems within which regional conservatoriums operate.**

schools categorised as non-government (i.e. Catholic or Independent). The schools within which regional conservatoriums deliver programs reflect the state proportions, as shown in Figure 2.

Similarly, an analysis of school types within which regional conservatoriums operate reveals that 73% are primary schools and 16% are secondary schools, reflecting proportions almost identical to state statistics of 72% primary and 18% secondary (18%) schools. As might be expected in regional and remote areas, the proportion of central schools within which conservatoriums work is significantly higher than the three percent reported in state data. Figure 3 depicts school types, as well as government/non-government breakdown.

It is particularly significant that almost three-quarters of the schools within which conservatoriums work are primary schools, since these schools do not traditionally have specialist

music teachers, thus highlighting the contribution of regional conservatoriums to this aspect of primary education.

### Disadvantage and socio-educational disadvantage

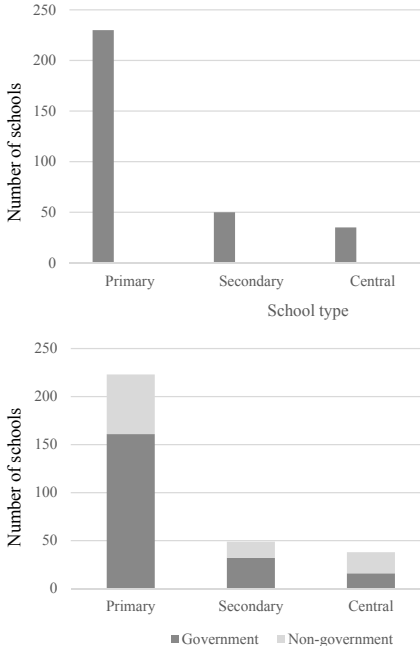
The State's 17 regional conservatoriums are all located in areas deemed "Disadvantaged" and "Most Disadvantaged" by the NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS) *Mapping Economic Disadvantage in NSW Report* (Vidyattama & Tanton, 2019), and the *Dropping off the edge 2015. Persistent communal disadvantage in Australia* report (Vinson et al., 2015), as shown in Figure 4.

The NCOSS mapping tool (NCOSS, 2019) categorises nine conservatoriums as being located in Disadvantaged areas and eight conservatoriums as being located in Most Disadvantaged areas of the state.

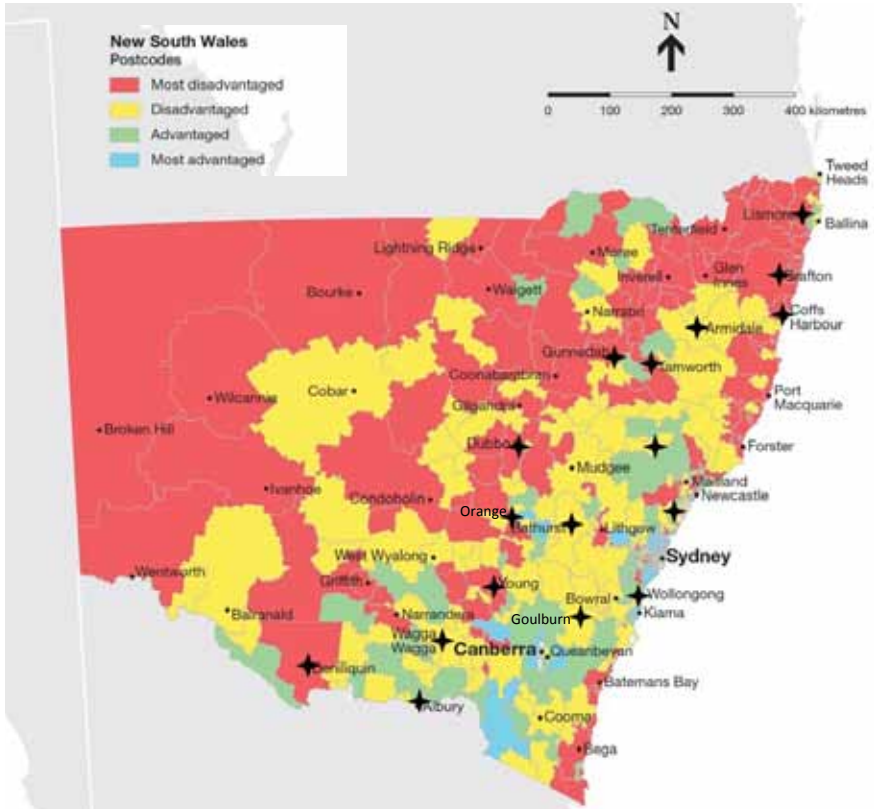
Further investigation of the socio-educational contexts within which the regional conservatoriums work is enabled through analysis of the Index of Community Social and Educational Advantage (ICSEA) scores for the schools within which the conservatoriums deliver programs. Created by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) as a means to enable meaningful comparisons of National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results, the index scale offers a numerical representation of the level of advantage or disadvantage of a school's student population (ACARA, 2015). Determined through analysis of both student factors (including parent occupation and education level) and school factors (including location and Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander population) (ACARA, 2015a), ICSEA data aids in illustrating the broad context within which the conservatorium network operates.

ICSEA scores have a median of 1,000 and a standard deviation of 100. ICSEA scores may lie between approximately 500 (representing extremely educationally disadvantaged backgrounds) and approximately 1,300 (representing schools with students with very

**Figure 3: School type with systemic breakdown.**



**Figure 4: Map of NSW disadvantage (Vinson Et Al, 2015) showing regional conservatorium locations.**



educationally advantaged backgrounds) (ACARA, 2015). As shown on the table below, the average ICSEA score of the schools within which regional conservatoriums work is 971, falling within the 36<sup>th</sup> percentile, and therefore reflecting socio-educational disadvantage. Significantly, 46 of the 316 schools within which the conservatoriums work (almost 15%) lie within the lowest 10<sup>th</sup> percentile.

The percentile range of the schools within which the conservatoriums work is extremely wide, ranging from the lowest first percentile representing extreme disadvantage, to the ninety-second percentile, reflecting high socio-educational advantage. The percentile range varies by up to 85 points in some

conservatoriums, necessitating careful and ethical management of programs and funding to ensure equitable access to music education for all students. Table 1 summarises data related to ICSEA for the schools within which the regional conservatoriums operate.

The aggregate distribution of ICSEA scores across the Inner Regional, Outer Regional, Rural and Remote areas within which the conservatoriums work depicts significant socio-educational disadvantage of the schools within which the conservatoriums operate, particularly when compared with the national distribution, as shown in Figures 5 and 6.

**Table 1: ICSEA Data Summary.**<sup>1</sup>

	Conservatorium data
Average score across schools in which conservatoriums operate	971
Range of scores across schools in which conservatoriums operate	737-1133
Average percentile across schools in which conservatoriums operate	36
Percentile Range across schools in which conservatoriums operate	1-92
Number of schools lying in lowest 10% in which conservatoriums operate	46

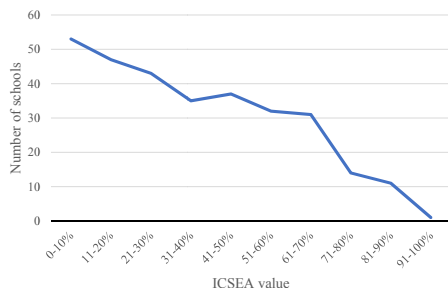
*1. While the ICSEA score offers some indication of educational advantage/disadvantage, these statistics must be considered alongside other relevant data to accurately depict socio-educational context (Preston, 2010).*

It should be noted that disadvantaged schools have not necessarily been targeted by regional conservatoriums, but rather these schools characterise the areas within which the conservatoriums operate.

**Schools with fewer than 100 students**

Ninety-three of the 316 schools (almost 30%) have student populations of less than 100. These small schools are perceived as being further disadvantaged (Halsey, 2018; NSW DEC, 2013). Providing equitable educational opportunities in small schools is challenging for many reasons (Lamb et al., 2014; DEC, 2013), including recruitment and retention of teachers (Monk, 2007); lack of access to specialist teachers (Brooks, 2020); lack of professional development opportunities (Howley & Howley, 2005); multi-age classrooms (Saqlain, 2015) and educating children with special needs (Rude & Miller, 2018).

**Figure 5: Distribution of ICSEA scores of schools within which regional conservatoriums work.**

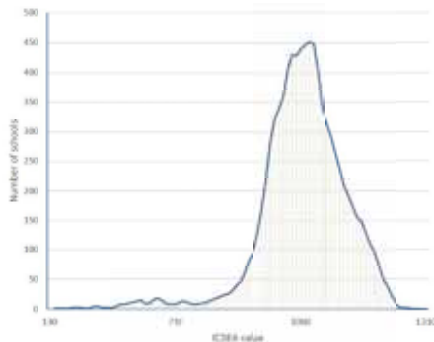


**Significance of school statistics**

Data presented in this section confirms the significant outreach of regional conservatoriums to students within disadvantaged schools in RRR areas of NSW and illustrates the socio-educational contexts within which the conservatoriums operate. Together with factors such as location and school size, the socio-educational disadvantage of the great majority of these schools would suggest that access to music education through programs delivered by regional conservatoriums may be the only opportunity many of the students have to engage with music learning and performance opportunities.

While it is not the focus of this paper, it is noted that regional conservatoriums receive only partial funding from the NSW Department of Education, but otherwise rely on tuition fees for delivery of

**Figure 6: Distribution of national ICSEA values 2015 (ACARA, 2015, p.2).**



programs and associated costs. Therefore, the socio-educational disadvantage of the schools within which the conservatoriums operate has serious implications for the capacity of RRR schools to afford music education services provided by regional conservatoriums. The significant travel costs incurred in bringing music education to these schools is also noted.

### Regional conservatorium programs addressing state and national government strategies

This section will outline and describe regional conservatorium programs as they address the response areas of the three documents named and described in the introduction. Following the description of each program, a table depicts the alignment of regional conservatorium programs with focus areas and recommendations of the *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education* (Halsey, 2018); NSW DEC's (2013) *Blueprint for Action*; and the recently-released *Rural and Remote Education Strategy 2021-2024* (DoE, 2021).

### Curricular music in schools

Schools located in RRR areas increasingly utilise partnerships with regional conservatoriums for support in delivering classroom music to meet curricular requirements, particularly when the school is small with limited staff resources (Sattler, 2016). Several regional conservatoriums employ qualified music teachers to provide regular classroom lessons in RRR schools. However, it is noted that most conservatoriums lack the financial

capacity to offer competitive salaries for qualified teachers, and therefore often find it difficult to employ enough teachers to meet demands.

The description of such teaching in a paper by Brooks (2020) includes interview data attesting the importance of providing high quality music teachers in ensuring that students living in RRR areas have access to music education and proposing that regular music classes facilitated engagement.

One-off music activities, like concerts, are always great, but the real learning happens in the classroom every week, when I can build on what they know, and teach them in ways that I know work in those places, and I can make it relevant for them. If I didn't do it, there would be no music at all in these schools. (Brooks, 2020, p.148)

### Early childhood music education

Most regional conservatoriums offer classes in Early Childhood Music Education, either on conservatorium premises, and/or at early learning centres within the conservatoriums' locales. While the delivery of music education within early learning centres is more costly to the conservatorium through time required for travel and setting up/packing up, this provision enables engagement in music education by greater numbers of children, including those with working parents or those vulnerable and disadvantaged who might not otherwise be exposed to formal music education.

The benefits of music learning in early childhood include improved language and literacy

**Table 2: Alignment of conservatorium-provided curricular music in schools with state and national government strategies.**

Document	Focus area or recommendation
Halsey (2018)	Provide illustrations of good practice to RRR schools to demonstrate how the Australian Curriculum can be interpreted and used flexibly to suit local contexts (p.37)
DEC (2013)	Curriculum access for all: Rural and remote students have improved access to a broad and quality curriculum. (p.15)
NSWDoE (2021)	Schools in rural and remote communities have a full complement of staff with the right skills to deliver the curriculum with a demonstrable impact on student achievement (p.8)

**Table 3: Alignment of conservatorium-provided early childhood music education with state and national government strategies.**

Document	Focus area or recommendation
Halsey (2018)	Ensure RRR children start school with a strong foundation for learning (p.55)
DEC (2013)	More children in rural and remote communities gain the benefits of quality early childhood education in at least the year before school (p.9)
NSWDoE (2021)	All rural and remote students have access to early childhood education to improve their emotional, cognitive and social awareness in the years before school (p.13)

development; pro-social behaviour and the development of gross and fine motor skills (Barrett et al., 2021). The inclusion of music in early learning is supported by both music education groups such as International Society for Music Education [ISME], and early learning standards, such as the Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009) which recommends music as contributing to Outcomes 3 (Children have a strong sense of wellbeing) and 5 (Children are effective communicators).

### Health and wellbeing

Perceived health and well-being benefits through participation in music-making have received increasing attention in the past 20 years. Regional conservatoriums offer community- and school-based programs designed to contribute to the improvement of wellbeing of participants. These programs may run as music therapy or community music experiences.

Consistent with the aims of the *Rural and Remote Education Strategy 2021-2024* (DoE, 2021), Pavlicevic (2012) describes group music therapy as:

participatory, inclusive musical action enacted and crafted collaboratively by all who attend  
 ... socially engaged and participative events that

**Table 4: Alignment of conservatorium-provided programs addressing health and wellbeing with state and national government strategies.**

Document	Focus area or recommendation
NSWDoE (2021)	Schools in rural and remote areas connect with students, parents, cultural and community groups to enhance their school profile and include student voice in learning and decision making (p.12)

impact on people’s lives, connect people with one another and create possibilities for social participation. (p. 196)

An example of such a program facilitated by regional conservatoriums is Drumbeat (Holyoake, 2021), an evidence-based social and emotional drumming program within which many regional conservatorium teachers have received training. Sattler’s (2016) Doctoral dissertation noted the potential of community music activity to contribute to sociocultural enrichment through investigation and description of the benefits derived from participation in community music activity. The ANSWRC has engaged with international expert on community music and inclusion, Phil Mullen (Music Education Solutions, 2021), to develop regional conservatorium teachers’ skills in this area.

Research conducted by regional conservatorium Heads of Agency around inclusion and the positive effects of musical engagement has been presented at international music education research conferences in recent years<sup>1</sup>, highlighting the contribution of regional conservatoriums in this area.

### Indigenous students

Of the 316 schools considered in this paper, Indigenous students constitute 14% of school population on average. This percentage ranges from 0 to 73%, as found in one school serviced by Tamworth Regional Conservatorium. While it is

<sup>1</sup> For example, Sattler’s presentations for International Society for Music Education (ISME); ISME Commission for Community Music Activity; and Asia Pacific Community Music Network



**Table 5: Alignment of conservatorium-provided programs for Indigenous students with state and national government strategies.**

Document	Focus area or recommendation
NSWDoE (2021)	Aboriginal students in rural and remote communities have access to coordinated services that support their wellbeing. (p.12)

unlikely that all, or even most, Indigenous students enrolled in RRR schools would utilise services such as individual tuition as provided by regional conservatoriums, opportunity for access to music education for these students is increased through conservatorium presence, and programs such as curricular classroom programs could potentially impact the lives and education of these students.

A current example of regional conservatoriums providing targeted programs for First Nations' students is the songwriting program delivered by Mitchell Conservatorium in partnership with the Wellington Information Network Centre. This program assists senior primary and junior secondary students in the development of confidence and capability in communicating and celebrating their stories through music.

### Instrumental and vocal tuition

Instrumental and vocal tuition is the key service offered by regional conservatoriums. ANSWRC members have recently introduced minimum standards for instrumental and vocal tutors employed within regional conservatoriums to ensure that students in RRR locations and schools have access to high quality music tuition. While regional conservatoriums may experience enormous difficulties in attracting and employing well-qualified teachers to their locations, more than 500 teachers are employed to deliver music education to RRR students within schools and on regional conservatorium campuses across the state. Within schools, regional conservatorium teachers deliver individual, shared and group tuition, as well as tuition with bands and other ensemble programs.

**Table 6: Alignment of conservatorium-provided instrumental and vocal programs with state and national government strategies.**

Document	Focus area or recommendation
DEC (2013)	Gifted and talented rural and remote students have the same curriculum opportunities as students in metropolitan areas (p.16)
NSWDoE (2021)	Schools in rural and remote communities have a full complement of staff with the right skills to deliver the curriculum with a demonstrable impact on student achievement.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, regional conservatoriums have delivered tuition via digital video means, ensuring RRR students are not further disadvantaged through distance.

### The National Music Teacher Mentoring Program

This program, designed and implemented by Richard Gill, one of Australia's foremost music educators and advocates, aims to improve the access to, and quality of, music education in Australian primary school classrooms, by "reigniting the capacity and passion for primary school teachers to deliver music programs" (Devery, 2019, p. 10). Grounded in vocal-based training with a strong focus on musical literacy and creativity, the program pairs experienced music educators with generalist classroom teachers to improve their skills and confidence in teaching music, thereby improving students' musicality and wellbeing, and enhancing engagement (AYO, 2019). Three regional conservatoriums facilitate the program, which progresses through lessons modelled by the mentor, to lessons team taught by mentor and mentee, and finally to lessons taught by the mentee and observed by the mentor. The process is framed by collaborative planning and reflection (Brooks, 2020).

**Table 7: Alignment of conservatorium-provided teacher mentoring with state and national government strategies.**

Document	Focus area or recommendation
Halsey (2018)	Improve the availability and diversity of in-school/locally based professional development for teachers in RRR schools and communities including by using visiting curriculum and pedagogy specialists (p.45)
DEC (2013)	8.1 Teachers, school leaders and administrative and support staff in rural and remote schools will have access to quality professional learning, mentoring and coaching programs (p.13)
NSWDoE (2021)	Teachers in rural and remote schools have access to the right learning and development, both face-to-face and online, to develop their professional skills based on their students' needs (p.8)

## Practicums for pre-service teachers

Recent media reports indicate a crisis in teacher supply, with RRR areas most affected (Baker, 2021). Providing professional experience in RRR locations for pre-service teachers is considered critical in building confidence to work in regional settings, as well as in increasing positive attitudes towards appointments in these locations (Boylan, 2004; Hudson & Hudson, 2008). Several authors advocate a focus on place-based teacher education, so that pre-service teachers might experience the place held by teachers in rural communities and their potential impact on rural sustainability (Dubel & Sobel, 2014; White et al., 2011). Successful rural practicum placements require positive collaboration between teacher educators, rural education leaders, and teaching staff to ensure that pre-service teachers are well-prepared for working in rural schools (Kline, White & Locke, 2013).

Regional conservatoriums assist in facilitating rural practicums through three-way partnerships with Sydney Conservatorium of Music (SCM) and an RRR school (Brooks, 2020). The practicums are enabled by the Richard Pulley Outreach and

**Table 8: Alignment of conservatorium-hosted practicums for pre-service teachers with state and national government strategies.**

Document	Focus area or recommendation
Halsey (2018)	Ensure RRR contexts, challenges and opportunities are explicitly included in the selection and pre-service education of teachers, initial appointment processes and their on-going professional support (p.45)
DEC (2013)	Graduates from NSW teacher education programs will have the skills and personal attributes for teaching in rural and remote schools (p.11)
NSWDoE (2021)	Teaching graduates complete their degree with practical experience and understanding of rural and remote community needs and context, and are actively encouraged to teach in rural and remote communities (p.8)

Regional Engagement Program, which "seeks to redress the imbalance in music resources in rural and more remote areas of New South Wales" (University of Sydney, 2019). Implemented as a means of bridging the gap between city and regional conservatoriums by having SCM students working on short projects or performing in RRR schools, the program has extended to support music education students who wish to undertake non-metropolitan practicum placements.

## Professional learning and development for school teachers

Regional conservatoriums assist in upskilling generalist primary school teachers in music education through provision and/or facilitation of professional learning opportunities. Of note, regional conservatorium staff present well-attended courses across the state through the NSW Teachers' Federation Centre for Professional Learning (CPL) and provide longer-term access to professional learning through the CPL journal and podcasts (Centre for Professional Learning, 2021).

**Table 9: Alignment of conservatorium-provided professional learning and development for school teachers with state and national government strategies.**

Document	Focus area or recommendation
Halsey (2018)	Improve the availability and diversity of in-school/locally based professional development for teachers in RRR schools and communities including by using visiting curriculum and pedagogy specialists (p.45)
DEC (2013)	Teachers, school leaders and administrative and support staff in rural and remote schools will have access to quality professional learning, mentoring and coaching programs (p.13)
NSWDoE (2021)	Teachers in rural and remote schools have access to the right learning and development, both face-to-face and online, to develop their professional skills based on their students' needs (p.8)

## Regional Youth Orchestra

NSW's Regional Youth Orchestra (RYO) was established in 2016 by ANSWRC. Talented students from regional conservatoriums across the state are invited to audition for the orchestra, and successful applicants play and perform with other young regional musicians, and with musicians from world class orchestras. The young musicians come together for two or three projects each year, where they learn from regional conservatorium staff, leading conductors and musicians, as well as tertiary students from Sydney Conservatorium of Music (SCM), who mentor the regional students via the Richard Pulley Program (ANSWRC, 2019; University of Sydney, 2016).

The role of the program is consistent with the function of youth orchestras as posited by Kartomi (2007, p. 141):

to assist individual pre-professional young musicians to enter their desired career path; and . . . in the interests of social justice, to provide access to music-educational opportunities for young people in areas of relative geographical remoteness and cultural isolation.

**Table 10: Alignment of conservatorium-facilitated Regional Youth Orchestra with state and national government strategies.**

Document	Focus area or recommendation
DEC (2013)	Gifted and talented rural and remote students have the same curriculum opportunities as students in metropolitan areas (p.16) More options will be provided for rural and remote students to participate in State arts and sports programs and other enrichment opportunities (p.17)

RYO projects also utilise partnerships with other orchestras and with SCM through the Richard Pulley Outreach and Regional Engagement Program as they directly increase RRR student achievement, ambition and access to equitable opportunities, as well as providing important experiences required to prepare for tertiary studies in music.

## University partnerships

Findings from several studies indicate that partnerships between RRR schools and external bodies can impact positively on students' social capital, particularly when building on a sense of place (Bauch, 2001; Kilpatrick, Johns & Mulford, 2002; Watson et al., 2017), and can "provide a strong basis for improving rural student outcomes and contribute to community strengthening" (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2010, p. 9). The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (Barr et al., 2008) contains an expectation that social partnerships be forged among schools and with groups external to their school. The National Review of School Music Education (Pascoe et al., 2005) advocates support for teachers' work through partnerships with music organisations and industry.

Regional conservatoriums have formal partnerships with Sydney Conservatorium of Music (SCM), New England University (UNE) and Central Queensland University (CQU), all of which facilitate opportunities for rural and remote students to participate in higher education.

**Table 11: Alignment of partnerships between conservatoriums and universities with state and national government strategies.**

Document	Focus area or recommendation
Halsey (2018)	Expand the availability, affordability and accessibility of high quality work experience placements, VET, dual VET/university options and two-year associate degree programs for RRR students (p.9)
DEC (2013)	Rural and remote students have access to quality transition pathways from secondary school into further education, training or employment. (p.17) New partnerships will be developed between schools, TAFE NSW, universities, employers (p.17)
NSWDoE (2021)	Partnerships between schools, universities, training providers and TAFE offer a breadth of opportunities aligned with the aspirations of rural and remote students (p.14)

The Richard Pulley Outreach and Regional Engagement Program (University of Sydney, 2016), referred to as the “buddy” program, involves SCM students participating in residencies involving tutoring and workshops for festivals and concerts, individual teaching and performance training, demonstrations and concerts in schools, and practicum placements, all hosted by regional conservatoriums. Historically, the first regional conservatorium (Mitchell Conservatorium) began operations as a division of SCM (formerly NSW State Conservatorium of Music) in 1978, (Mitchell Conservatorium, 2021), and close relations have been maintained.

Four regional conservatoriums partner with CQU in delivering Diploma of Music and Bachelor of Music study programs. Students undertake individual instrumental or vocal tuition with qualified regional conservatorium staff in classical, jazz or popular music (Riverina Conservatorium, 2021) without the need to travel or relocate to metropolitan areas. Similarly, another four conservatoriums partner with UNE in delivering performance aspects of RRR students’ tertiary studies in music. These programs not only assist in providing access to post-school opportunities, but also restrict costs associated with relocation and graduates may join the educational workforce in their own RRR locations.

## Conclusion

Regional conservatoriums deliver music education to schools and communities across RRR areas of

NSW, as well as in the major centres of Wollongong and the Central Coast. The positive relationships between regional conservatoriums and NSW schools have facilitated valuable music learning and performance experiences for students who might otherwise be disadvantaged through distance from major urban centres. Regional conservatoriums have demonstrated their capacity and potential to make significant contributions in addressing disadvantage, thereby broadening access and increasing equity and engagement for RRR students, as well as meeting the challenges outlined in three government initiatives aimed at alleviating RRR disadvantage. In so doing, regional conservatoriums offer an exemplar for organisations to work collaboratively with government departments and agencies in meeting the needs of RRR education.

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