



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND YOUTH AFFAIRS  
Mr Michael Pettersson MLA (Chair), Mrs Elizabeth Kikkert MLA (Deputy Chair)  
Mr Mark Parton MLA

## Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into the cessation of the Music  
for Colleges course

**Submission Number: 24**

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To the Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs,

I write to you in support of the Music For Colleges (H Course) program, which for over 35 years has been the foremost secondary music education program in the ACT and surrounding region.

My connection with the H Course began in 2009 as a Year 11 Classical Type 1 student, where I enhanced my knowledge of music performance, history, composition, aural and theory. Along with many H Course graduates, I draw on these skills every day in my career and am thankful to this program for strengthening these vital aspects of my musical understanding and skill set.

Since late 2015, I have had the privilege of teaching the Classical H-Course. Even in this relatively short time, it is humbling to see that a number of my former students are completing tertiary music study and are about to enter the Australian professional music scene. Equally, many of my current Year 12 students are already auditioning for tertiary music placements, with the intention of pursuing a career in music. While this is truly heart-warming, their success is surely matched by the disappointment of now-Year 11 students who have not had access to the H Course this year; these young musicians are feeling a mixture of lack of motivation and lack of respect for their desired career. Ultimately if they still pursue tertiary music, they will commence programs with a noticeably lower skill set than their H Course counterparts. This must be addressed.

The H Course specialises in teaching music history, composition and music theory – the standard of which is equivalent to that of any tertiary music department in Australia or overseas. Students are also trained as high-level soloists and chamber musicians, learning from many of the foremost musicians in Canberra and often participating in guest masterclasses with international visitors, where they easily hold their own with participating tertiary students.

This program facilitates significant musical opportunities academically above and beyond any other program in the region, equipping local students with a unique skill set as they pursue further study. Indeed the success of the program can be seen in the high number of H Course graduates throughout the country and overseas in top musical and leadership positions, as well as in the high number of H Course alumni who are central to Canberra's professional music scene.

When the cessation of funds for this program was announced, it was suggested that potential future students could participate in "other ACT Government-funded music programs including through Music For Canberra." I'm proud to have a long association with the Canberra Youth Orchestra, however the musical experiences in a 60+ person ensemble are completely different to the academic rigour of the H Course or the one-on-one nature of instrumental and ensemble delivery that is critical to developing well-educated and multifaceted musicians – not just musicians who have enjoyed a flagship orchestral experience (as much as that is fantastic!).

Equally, it was advised that potential future students could participate in non-auditioned programs for “Year 7 to 12 students” and the broader community through the Open School of Music. It is absolutely vital that ArtsACT supports non-auditioned programs for the general public, however it is impossible for such a program to facilitate the same specialised training that is achieved in a cohort of auditioned Year 11 and Year 12 students. It would be inconceivable to suggest placing 12- to 18-year-old elective Mathematics students all in one class, or to have maths-interested adults in the general public join in on a Year 12 class, so why is this suggested for Music?

The academic nature of the H Course with a small and specialised cohort fosters intense development and drive from talented and passionate young musicians, which is what results in their ongoing success.

Insofar as demand is discussed, for each of my three years on the Classical H Course audition panel, there was roughly a 50% acceptance rate into the Year 11 class. This was a direct result of high numbers of skilled applicants applying for a select program, many of whom had (and still have) the intention of pursuing music as a career.

In 2015, Music Australia estimated that live music injects over \$1.2 billion into the Australian economy annually. By ceasing funding for high-level academic pre-tertiary training, the local government is suggesting to students that it does not value music as a future career choice – and, possibly of greater concern, suggesting that the professional musicians (and the training) in Canberra and the wider region are also not valued as a viable career choice. When a significant number of students in our National Capital cannot access a Year 11-12 academic music program at their school (let alone one of a select high standard), yet many of these students would listen to music daily and aspire to pursue it as a profession, the inadequacies of our education system need to be addressed.

Currently, a high number of H Course graduates proceed to tertiary Music study either at the ANU, interstate or overseas. With the recent growth of the School of Music, the past few years have seen an increase in H Course graduates continuing their studies locally. In the same way that the 2012 damage to the now-rebuilding School of Music was widely felt in the broader community (lack of professional musicians and highly-skilled music students, resulting in national reputational damage and small tertiary cohorts) the cessation of H Course funding must be addressed in order to avoid further long-term damage to Canberra’s community, and our reputation as the National Capital.

It would be a pleasure to appear before the Committee in June to assist in any way possible with discussions surrounding continuing the Music for Colleges program.

With my best wishes,  
Leonard

Leonard Weiss

