



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL
TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT
AND YOUTH AFFAIRS**

(Reference: [Inquiry into the cessation of the Music for Colleges course](#))

Members:

**MR M PETTERSSON (Chair)
MRS E KIKKERT (Deputy Chair)
MR M PARTON**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

WEDNESDAY, 10 JULY 2019

**Secretary to the committee:
Mrs N Kosseck (Ph: 620 50435)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

WITNESSES

FRANCES, PROFESSOR RAELENE, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences,
Australian National University**36**

TALBOT, MR MATTHEW, General Manager, College of Arts and Social
Sciences, Australian National University**36**

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9.31 am.

FRANCES, PROFESSOR RAELENE, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences,
Australian National University

TALBOT, MR MATTHEW, General Manager, College of Arts and Social Sciences,
Australian National University

THE CHAIR: Good morning. Welcome to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs. The proceedings today are in relation to the committee's inquiry into the cessation of the music for colleges course. Please be aware that the proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. Witnesses are asked to familiarise themselves with the privilege statement provided on the table. Could I confirm that you have read the privilege card, the pink sheet, and that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Prof Frances: Yes.

Mr Talbot: Confirmed.

THE CHAIR: Excellent. Would you like to make a short opening statement?

Prof Frances: Yes. I would like to start by thanking you for the invitation to talk to you about this important issue. I want to say a few key points about our perspective on these issues before we open it up for general questions.

Music is an important part of the life of Canberra, as I am sure you are all very aware, and we are delighted that the community consistently endorses the important role that the School of Music can play in supporting music, not just for the students who take our courses but for the music aspects of the community more generally. We strive at the ANU to be a place of excellence in teaching, research and service, working both within the university and with the government and the community to deliver our vision for music and creative arts in the ACT.

We note that the ANU has, for more than 30 years, delivered quality, advanced music tuition for ACT year 11 and 12 students. We have nurtured students and their passions for music into programs and successful careers in musicology, technology, composition and performance. We are proud of our graduates and their teachers and for the opportunity to work with the ACT government to support these students and the contribution they make more broadly to the cultural life of our capital city. We have always made it clear that we are keen to find a solution, and that is still the case.

Specifically, on the cessation of the H-course, the decision to cut the funding was taken by artsACT because it no longer fitted their priorities. We have had extensive discussions about that. We perfectly understand that they have broadened their priorities since initially providing this funding and that they want their programs to be more broadly community funded. As I say, they have made it clear that the H-course no longer fits those priorities because it is essentially an education program.

This has left a shortfall in funding to run the H-course, the music for colleges extension course—whatever it is called—of around \$230,000 a year. That made it unviable for the ANU to continue to run the course because we already subsidise the School of Music to the tune of millions of dollars a year. This was an additional impost that we could not afford, especially as it was essentially for high school students, not tertiary students, which is our basic mission as a commonwealth-established university.

I want to clarify one point in our submission, though, about commonwealth funding. We do receive around \$300,000 a year, in total, for all of the H-courses, for the music course, plus the roughly 400 students who take the other 12 H-courses, those courses in Asian languages, maths, physics, engineering and so on. A small part of that amount of money is for the music students, who are a minority. Around \$40,000 comes to us as a result of government funding for those commonwealth-supported places. But we do not charge any of the extension students HECS. That means, as a whole, the university runs these courses at a loss, and we choose to do that as part of what we see as our community responsibility.

After the initial funding decision was made by artsACT, we did seek to find ways that we might be able to still keep the course going. We tried very hard to see if we could have another look at the course, to see if it could fit with their priorities. But we kept running up against the insoluble problem that, if we modified the H-course to fit artsACT priorities, it would no longer satisfy the accreditation requirements to count for the ATAR and to be accredited as a university course.

We were caught between a rock and a hard place with artsACT, and that was clarified in a meeting that we had with the minister, Gordon Ramsay, and our vice-chancellor earlier this year. We then accepted that it was not going to happen. We subsequently had a meeting with staff from the Education Directorate, in March, where we talked about the cost of the program. We discussed whether it might be possible to run it more cheaply. That meeting was exploratory, and at the end of that meeting on 14 March we were told that staff in the directorate would give it more thought and that they would get back to us. We heard no more until yesterday afternoon, when I received an email suggesting that we reopen discussions to find a solution.

As I have said from the outset, we really value this course. We think it is incredibly important, not just for the students who go through the course but for the impact those students have when they go back to their high schools. Even though they may not all come through and study music degrees at the ANU, many of them go on to have careers in music in other states or overseas. Many of them continue to take music as part of double degrees at the ANU, or as electives.

I think it is really important that we retain some of our talented musicians in the national capital to contribute to what is clearly a community that values music for very good reasons. I personally am passionate about the role that music can play in our society, so we would really like to find a way to keep this program going.

THE CHAIR: I will lead off with some questions. You mentioned the requirements for accreditation of the H-course. What exactly are those requirements that the H-course needs to be an accredited course?

Prof Frances: I could give you further detail on notice. I would not want to go into it all here. Basically, it cannot be something that is open to the broader community. Students have to qualify to be part of the course and they have to satisfy certain levels of achievement throughout the course. That is not something that you can do when you have a course that is open broadly to the community, who do not have to have the same levels of attainment.

It is an academically rigorous program and in order to satisfy those criteria we have to stick to that. If you just opened it to any comers, it would not be viable to do that. We can take that question on notice and provide you with precise detail, if that would be helpful.

THE CHAIR: That would be very good. I am just trying to find out a little bit more detail. Is the sticking point here that there is a selection process and there is an audition, or is the sticking point the cost?

Prof Frances: The sticking point for the ANU is the cost, because we cannot afford to do this. The sticking point from the point of view of the accreditation is the requirements that are set by the ACT, actually, around what you need to do to qualify a course to be accredited towards an ATAR. Also, it is about what the ANU needs, because it counts for two things: it counts for your ATAR and it counts towards a university degree.

We have very rigorous standards at the ANU, for obvious reasons. We are the national university. In order for us to say, “Yes, this course will count towards a degree at the ANU,” we have standards that we must impose, which include rigorous selection. All of our students go through an audition process. The added difficulty, too, is that those students then need to achieve an ATAR of 80 in order to come into the ANU at the end of it, so it is quite demanding.

MR PARTON: It is my understanding that, with those community outreach programs, which seem extremely worthwhile, that are coming through artsACT, it is really more about broader participation.

Prof Frances: Absolutely.

MR PARTON: That is where it falls short in terms of the requirements for the course?

Prof Frances: Yes, that is exactly right. I think there has been a bit of confusion in the public mind. In the past we have had two sorts of programs. We have had the H-course, which is basically a university extension course, but we have also run these other broader engagement programs which, as you say, are just to get people inspired about music. They get exposed to some fantastic teachers in the process but there is no assessment at the end of it. It is really about having fun, enjoying music and getting inspired. Some of those students probably do come on to do formal study, but that is not the main objective.

That, from my understanding, is artsACT’s view of it, which I entirely support. They

want to have these cultural experiences open to a broad range of the community, regardless of their financial situation. The ANU is happy to participate in that, provided we can have the funding and provided it is consistent with the other things that we do.

MRS KIKKERT: How do you participate in the outreach programs?

Prof Frances: They are advertised and people can sign up for them.

MRS KIKKERT: Do the students come to ANU or do you provide—I just want to see what it looks like on the ground—support for them in a class that you have in a community centre? What does it look like?

Prof Frances: Again, I would have to take the details of that on notice. It is not something I am personally very involved in. It is run out of the School of Music and some of the programs are run on the campus. But I would not put my hand on my heart and say all of them were.

THE CHAIR: Would you be able to give us a breakdown of what the different elements of the H-course cost? How much is private, one-on-one tuition, how much is lectures and how much is administration?

Prof Frances: The one-on-one lessons, from the costings that I have seen, comprise around \$60,000 to \$70,000 of the total cost and the rest of that goes into the teaching. What is different about the H-course in music compared to the other courses is that we have specific teaching events that are designed just for the music extension courses. I think all these classes occur on a Tuesday evening when we are not teaching our undergraduates.

They are designed especially for talented students who are coming in, in order to get up to speed, to university level. They are not necessarily at university level when they come in. We cannot just throw them in with the usual undergraduate courses; we have to put them in these bespoke teaching events. That is where the major cost is, because we have teachers who are employed especially to do that. Of course there is some element of that money that goes to the administration of the course; there is always administration that you need to do those courses.

There is confusion in people's minds sometimes, I think, between the music course and the other 12 courses. The music course is funded out of artsACT. The other 12 courses are funded out of the Education Directorate. And to run all of those 12 courses we get \$120,000 a year.

MR PARTON: It is interesting the way you have characterised that, because that was not what we heard from the minister yesterday. What we heard from the minister yesterday was that there is funding that comes from the Education Directorate to the ANU to run H-courses and that the ANU has made a decision to prioritise some ahead of music. That is not how you characterise it, because what you have said basically is that the only financial support for H-course music was coming from artsACT. That is correct?

Prof Frances: Yes, that is exactly how it has worked. We had a separate funding scheme for the H-course in music that came out of artsACT. The money that came from the Education Directorate was, as the minister said, for the ANU to provide other courses. Technically she is correct that ANU decides. Of course, we did not decide to provide music out of that batch because music was funded out of artsACT. That \$120,000 provides support for the 400 students who do the 12 courses, as I have said, in these other disciplines and that \$120,000 can stretch that far. It does not cover the cost, I might say.

We still subsidise all those courses to varying degrees, but nowhere near what it would cost music, because those students are added to existing classes. It is not like you have to have a certain level of musical performance. If you are a smart kid doing physics you can go in and sit with the undergraduates and do those classes. We are not running special teaching events for those students. It is a marginal cost in that circumstance.

In theory the university could say, “We no longer have the money for music.” We have got this \$120,000. In theory we could say we are going to stop teaching these other 400 students in all these other disciplines but that would not make much sense to me because we still would not have enough money to do it and, also, is that a good decision to stop our bright students in the ACT having access to university courses in science and engineering and Asian languages? It is not a decision I would want to make.

THE CHAIR: Could you take on notice a breakdown of the costs for the music H-course?

Prof Frances: Beyond the—

THE CHAIR: You gave a number before, with the funding shortfall, of what it was. I am assuming that on some level you have got a calculation of how much it costs to put on the program.

Prof Frances: Yes, it costs \$270,000, \$275,000 a year, depending on how many students do the course. We get around \$40,000 in commonwealth-supported place money. If you take away that, the shortfall is \$230,000 or thereabouts.

THE CHAIR: I was hoping you could actually give us the detail of what that money gets spent on.

MR PARTON: Not necessarily here.

THE CHAIR: Yes, take it on notice. You mentioned the \$60,000 for one-on-one tuition. I am assuming that you know what comprises the rest of that spending.

Prof Frances: The rest of that spending goes on employing the teachers who run the classes, run the ensembles, do the marking, the auditions et cetera, plus a smaller amount for the administration, advertising of the course, enrolling the students, assessment and that kind of—

THE CHAIR: That is an excellent answer but can you take on notice that we actually get that detail?

Prof Frances: The breakdown?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Prof Frances: Absolutely.

MR PARTON: It only has to be a one-pager.

THE CHAIR: It does not have to be anything—

Prof Frances: Sure. We have all that information. We report every year back to artsACT on the program, which includes the financial reports. Of course we have all that information.

MRS KIKKERT: How much are you getting from artsACT for the music?

Prof Frances: For this?

MRS KIKKERT: Yes, for the music.

Prof Frances: In the past we have had around \$275,000.

MRS KIKKERT: That is the \$275,000 you were talking about before?

Prof Frances: If I am correct, yes.

Mr Talbot: That is correct. \$275,000 has been the contracted funding for that deliverable of all the program until now.

MRS KIKKERT: Has it always been like that in the history of this course?

Mr Talbot: The deed of agreement is renegotiated in three-year blocks. It would always have been around that but it may have been up and down depending on the priorities of all parties involved, including artsACT. It might have been \$250,000, \$270,000 but I can provide that data because it is publicly available.

MRS KIKKERT: I am just trying to understand all this. The \$275,000 that had been given to you, now that artsACT wants to use it for programs within the community, not just the H-course—

Prof Frances: Absolutely.

MRS KIKKERT: But even when they want to do that, they still expect that there will be enough for the H-course?

Prof Frances: No. They have specifically said we are not to use the money on the H-course. When we put in our schedule of things that we wanted support for, we put

in the H-course but that was specifically ruled out by artsACT because they said it does not fit with their priorities.

MR PARTON: Was there any anticipation of that? Was that flagged at all in the lead-up to—

Prof Frances: I was not here at the time. I have only been at the ANU for the past two years. This was in the wind before I came.

MR PARTON: Are you aware, Mr Talbot?

Mr Talbot: I am not aware that it was flagged.

MRS KIKKERT: Yesterday the minister mentioned that there has been conversation about it that started several years ago, and now it has finally come to this conclusion.

Mr Talbot: We will take that on notice. There are a number of people who may or may not have been involved with that.

Prof Frances: I know that since the beginning of last year, when I really started becoming involved when I took over my role as dean, there was an anticipation that this would happen, because artsACT had clarified its priorities. From my understanding, from when that was first raised, we were looking to see how we could rejig the H-course so that it might fit the new priorities. But from very early on, it became clear that this was going to be extremely difficult. We did not give up; we kept trying. But, as you can see, it is a difficult landscape to navigate, because we have to try to work into those priorities but also deal with the accreditation issues. We also are constrained that we cannot charge fees for these courses.

MRS KIKKERT: In your conversations with artsACT, has there ever been any indication that they can do both, that they can provide the H-course and also the outreach program, meaning that they can increase the funding?

Prof Frances: No. It is very clear. They have made it very clear that it just does not fit their priorities. And if you look at their priorities, it does not fit their priorities. It is an educational program for year 11 and 12 students only.

MRS KIKKERT: Yes. So they want to shift it over.

Prof Frances: They are trying to have programs which have broader community access. I perfectly understand their position.

MRS KIKKERT: Which is absolutely fine, yes. Do you feel that they want to shift it over to the Education Directorate to run it?

Prof Frances: I do not know what they want, but it seems to me—I might be being simplistic about this—that education sits with the Education Directorate.

THE CHAIR: Was the person who contacted you yesterday from artsACT or the Education Directorate?

Prof Frances: Education Directorate. It was Ross Hawkins.

MR PARTON: Did you look at any of the hearing from yesterday?

Prof Frances: I got a summary of it. I was tied up in meetings.

MRS KIKKERT: They are probably listening right now.

MR PARTON: There was a suggestion made on a number of occasions that there were negotiations in place with ANU regarding a possible solution that ANU was going to somehow magically come up with to keep the H-course alive. Indeed, there were a number of questions that ministers and those from the directorate said they were not able to answer because they had not received this final response from the ANU.

Prof Frances: I can answer that. There has been no suggestion that there was anything more to be said to artsACT. The meeting that I attended with our vice chancellor and the minister, in February, made it clear that there was no possibility that artsACT could change its mind, and we made it clear that there was nothing we could see that we could do to change the course to make it fit with their priorities. As far as I am concerned, those discussions ended then.

MR PARTON: Why would the minister have said that yesterday?

Prof Frances: You will have to ask the minister that. Maybe it is a miscommunication.

THE CHAIR: I think you are potentially conflating the two ministers.

MR PARTON: Granted I guess they did, and it was good that we had both of them in.

Prof Frances: The statement that came out of the Education Directorate is not my recollection or my record of our negotiations. We had a meeting. I am a kind of obsessed person who keeps notes on all my meetings. It is good discipline for a dean, let me tell you. We had a meeting on 14 March. My conclusion of the meeting reads: "No action needed from us. They will give it more thought."

MRS KIKKERT: They said otherwise.

Prof Frances: I heard no more until I had that email from Ross Hawkins yesterday afternoon. At that meeting we did discuss whether it might be possible to offer something that was cheaper. Although we have not heard back from them, we have still been looking into this. We can do something cheaper, but it will be less than what we do now. We can offer fewer courses; we can take in fewer students.

MR PARTON: That is one of the things that came through in the government submission. They spoke of the fact that the H-course in music has around 60 students over the two college years who are participating. In their submission, they scoped that number out as a percentage of all students in the ACT, basically to say that it was a

very small number of students that we are talking about. Is that a significant part of what is going on here: that perhaps we should consider the funding as being less important because it is going to assist such a small number of students?

Prof Frances: Again, that is a decision for the government rather than for the university to make. My personal view on that is that we are trying here to nurture really high standard performance musicians who will go on to contribute to cultural life, in some instances in Canberra and in some instances in other parts of Australia and the world. Our students go internationally. Inevitably, it is going to be a relatively small number of students who have that kind of talent.

MR PARTON: Of course it is. The H-course runs to the end of the year, and then it is done. I think you really answered this earlier, but if the government, through either artsACT or the Education Directorate, came forward and said, “We got this wrong. Here is 250 grand to sort that out,” how difficult or easy would it be to just roll on and continue with that course in 2020 and beyond?

Prof Frances: It would be extremely easy. We have always hoped that this might happen. We have not dismantled any of the infrastructure around it. The course is still there. We can easily get the staff. We still have staff teaching out to the current thing. It would just be a matter of advertising, auditioning and enrolling the students. We could be ready to go at the beginning of next year.

MR PARTON: They sit in committees like this and talk about amounts of money like \$250,000. It is still a quarter of a million dollars; it is still a fair bit of money, whichever way you want to look at it. In previous evidence we have heard about pathways that are offered in other jurisdictions for high-performing music students. Let us look at New South Wales, at the various performing arts high schools, which do a wonderful job. But you are looking at bang for buck. You are looking at a quarter of a million here and at whatever else is spent in New South Wales. Could I get a reflection from you as to the value for money on that, compared to what is done in other jurisdictions?

Prof Frances: I think it is excellent value, to be perfectly honest. I was in Victoria for over 10 years as a dean of arts at Monash University and I saw the money that the state government there put into various music activities, both at the tertiary level and for high school students. It is a lot more money. The population size is different, obviously, but I think for \$250,000 this is very good value for this community. Do not forget that the students here do not have other options. They really do not. We are losing our best students from here. It is probably not so bad for the students, in that they can go other places, but it is not good for Canberra. If we are wanting to have a really vibrant musical life to our community, we want to keep some of our good musicians, in my view.

THE CHAIR: What do you mean we are losing them?

Prof Frances: If we cannot offer this avenue, I think some of those students will go to Sydney and Melbourne. They will seek out those opportunities and the specialist music schools there.

THE CHAIR: Because they do not have the H-course, they will not choose ANU?

Prof Frances: Yes, because what the H-course does is take the most talented students from all of the schools in the ACT and bring them together in a bespoke program where they feed off each other, they are exposed to really terrific facilities and fantastic teachers, they get excited, they perform at their best, they get really motivated and they go back to their schools and share the love, share that excitement and share what they are learning. So it has a bigger impact than just measuring the impact on the dozen students who might go through to do a bachelor of music.

MR PARTON: You speak of losing those students potentially to other jurisdictions. One of the other fears that have been expressed in this room is losing those students to high-performance music. I am particularly referring to students from lower socio-economic backgrounds where all of a sudden, without the H-course, it is not possible to progress. There is just a complete roadblock you cannot get around.

Prof Frances: That is right. And they do not have the option, probably, to move to Melbourne or Sydney.

THE CHAIR: In terms of student interest in this course, do you know how many students audition for the H-course each year?

Prof Frances: I would have to take that on notice, I do not know that off the top of my head.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MRS KIKKERT: You mentioned before the \$300,000 that you get in total from the federal government. That is specifically for the 12 H-courses, correct?

Prof Frances: It is 13 if you count music.

MRS KIKKERT: Has any of that funding gone to the music course?

Prof Frances: Well, \$40,000 of that is for music students.

MRS KIKKERT: That is right; you mentioned that before. The impression I got yesterday from the minister for education is, “ANU receives this amount of money from the federal government. Why can’t you add some of that money into music beyond \$40,000?” That is the impression I got from the minister.

Prof Frances: The answer to that is that that money actually comes in for the other students doing the other courses and it is needed to subsidise them. As I said, all of those courses, despite the commonwealth money, run at a loss, and the various colleges decide to subsidise those because they think it is important that we do it. So it is not as though it is possible for music to say, “We want the money that is actually being provided for students to study maths or physics.” That is not an option. In terms of the ANU more generally, the ANU already contributes, as I said, millions of dollars to support the School of Music generally each year. The vice-chancellor, in the light of the Podger report, committed \$12.5 million dollars over the next, I think, five-year

period. And the college that I am the dean of adds to that subsidy again to the tune of millions of dollars a year. It is a huge financial impost on the university.

MR PARTON: Please excuse my ignorance on this. As the H-course in music is offered to 11 and 12, are we going to have a situation where the students who are participating in the course this year in year 11 will only do half the course?

Prof Frances: No. This is what the teach-out is for. We did not have an intake this year.

THE CHAIR: How many students who enrol in a music program at ANU come from the local community? I do not think you have the answer, but could you take that on notice?

Prof Frances: I can take that one on notice. I cannot tell you off the top of my head. There are increasing numbers, I am pleased to say.

THE CHAIR: That is good to hear. Could you also tell us how many come from the H-course and go on to study music at ANU or other universities, if you have access to that.

Prof Frances: We can do that.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for coming along. On behalf of the committee I would like to thank the witnesses who have appeared today. The secretary will provide you with a copy of the proof transcript of today's hearings when it is available. If you have taken any questions on notice, could you please get those answers to the committee secretary as soon as possible?

The committee adjourned at 10.04 am.