

REVIVE Review

The approach to the National Cultural Policy framed by Five Pillars was significant, particularly the preface of ‘a place for every story, a story for every place’. However, the implementing of the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*, a major component of the First Pillar, has not occurred. Given its significance, the government must come up with an alternative approach and not just pretend it is no longer relevant because of the defeat of the national referendum. We know from our own history that ignoring our relationship with our First Peoples is damaging to both their community, and to our nation. Hence there must be an action in the revised policy that adequately addresses this issue.

Within *Revive* it was noted that,

The Government recognises that it will not be possible to address all of the needs of the cultural and creative sector in the immediate term (Australian Government 2023 a, 96).

Thus, arguably the government was providing itself with a ‘let out’ clause. Some of the major gaps not addressed by *Revive* are as follows:

- Arts Training and Education
- Creative Australia
- Arts Funding
- The Economic Position of mid-career and senior artists
- Cost Efficiencies within National Institutions
- International Programs

Arts Training and Education

A major deficit of the policy and its ensuing actions has been the ignoring of the policies that were introduced by the previous Coalition Government in relation to arts education. The previous Federal Coalition Government described arts training as a ‘lifestyle’ choice rather than a preparation for a serious profession. This has resulted in many creative arts training programs being cut or dramatically reduced in the past 10 years. Further the previous Federal Coalition Government *increased* the cost of an arts degree by 113%. This is compared to the cost of a science degree which was *reduced* by between 20-62% depending on the field. This unfair scenario has yet to be addressed

by the Federal Labor Government. Hence arts students are paying proportionally much more for their degrees than their peers in other disciplines. They are also incurring larger long term HECS debts which, given their likely lower earning capacity than say engineers, is negatively affecting their lives in the long term.

Creative Australia

Creative Australia, given the changes embedded in Revive, has been re-constructed into a much more complex organisation than previously. However, no attention has been paid to its capacity to address this complexity. When it was created, it was seen as a ‘not for profit’ arts funding entity for Australian arts practice, driven by peer assessment and at ‘arm’s length’ from the government of the day. It is now expected to deliver across the spheres of ‘not for profit’, ‘for profit’, philanthropy and international. This means that many of its functions conflict with each other. In addition, its relationship ‘vis à vis’ the minister and government are ambiguous. Hence the debacle created by the Sabasi Venice Commission. There should be a review of the Council as a matter of urgency so that it is ‘fit for purpose’ (Caust 2024). The arts community is now wary of Creative Australia and is not sure who it is serving, the arts sector or the government.

Arts Funding

Revive provided increased funding for certain aspects of the arts. But it didn’t address the funding overall shortfall that already existed and the drastic cuts to the sector that occurred from 2016 onwards. In addition, companies have continued to be cut in the past 3 years. Many artists and arts organisations are giving up applying for funding because the process is too wearing, not fit for purpose and not based on equity. The inability to address the funding gap and the outdated funding processes are matters of urgency, given the damage that this is causing to the sector on a regular basis.

The Economic Position of mid-career and senior artists

The work of David Throsby and his associates over forty years have proven that artists and arts workers continue to live in poverty (Throsby & Petetskaya 2024). The government needs to address the reality of artists’ lives and introduce a different approach to supporting them. Whether it be the Irish approach of providing a stable regular income or introducing a program of ongoing fellowships, this issue must be taken seriously by government.

Cost Efficiencies within National Institutions

Despite ongoing evidence that continually cutting budgets of small institutions undermines their ability to exist, the national collecting institutions are still expected to undertake annual cost efficiencies in their budgets. This is despite ongoing complaints about the effect of this on relatively small cultural agencies. This approach makes neither economic or political sense and could and should be dealt with by government urgently.

International Programs

Responsibility for all international collaborations now reside with Creative Australia although they may not have the knowledge or contacts to successfully pursue them. This is another urgent area that needs serious addressing. International collaborations might be better served by another independent agency (as occurs in other nations), that are specifically charged with forging international collaboration and exchanges.

Final comment

In the Public Consultation Paper on P. 5 it is noted that,

In 2023–24 cultural and creative activity contributed \$67.4 billion to Australia’s economy and employed over 591,000 people.

Given this economic reality the amount of money provided to say Creative Australia of \$317 million in 2024-25 (Creative Australia Annual Report 2024-25) is paltry in comparison to the benefits generated. It is time that the Australian Government stepped up and treated the arts and cultural sector with the seriousness it deserves. As noted elsewhere Australia’s contribution to the arts and cultural sector is in the bottom half of OECD nations and is at its lowest level since 2017-18 (Predavec & Grundy 2026). Australia has an opportunity with its revised cultural policy to remedy these issues and demonstrate actual respect and generosity to the arts sector.

References

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