

The next iteration of Australia's Cultural Policy must place a stronger emphasis on arts education and creative training across all levels of learning, from primary education through to tertiary study. The current approach does not adequately recognise the role that creative arts education plays in child development, student engagement, academic achievement, and the long-term sustainability of Australia's cultural sector.

At present, many Primary School teachers receive only minimal creative arts training during their undergraduate teaching degrees — often as little as three weeks. This does not reflect the depth, breadth, or pedagogical value of arts education. The arts are not simply recreational activities; they are powerful tools for developing confidence, communication, critical thinking, creativity, and engagement in young learners. Despite this, arts learning in many primary settings is reduced to passive, highly simplified activities such as following online tutorials or replicating dance routines, rather than meaningful creative exploration and skill development.

There is also insufficient understanding within primary education of how creative arts learning can support outcomes across all Key Learning Areas. The arts have the capacity to unlock learning in literacy, history, science, social development, and emotional wellbeing. However, they are too often treated as low-priority “Friday afternoon” activities rather than rigorous and academically valuable disciplines. This contributes directly to the ongoing undervaluing of arts subjects in secondary education, where their intellectual and cultural significance is frequently misunderstood.

These attitudes continue into tertiary education, where declining institutional and government support for creative arts programs is resulting in course cuts and reduced opportunities nationwide. This undermines both the cultural sector and the future workforce required to sustain it.

As a craft practitioner, I also believe the current policy fails to adequately recognise the importance of craft practice within Australia's cultural landscape. The ongoing undervaluation of craft and creative labour is reflected in the low average incomes of craft practitioners, many of whom are women. If Australia is serious about valuing the work of women, then it must also value the forms of cultural labour traditionally undertaken by women — including storytelling, teaching, making, community care, and craft practice.

Historically, many men were able to sustain their creative practices through teaching and arts education roles. However, as women increasingly gained access to tertiary qualifications and teaching positions within higher education, funding cuts and course reductions in the arts accelerated. The diminishing support for arts education raises important questions about whose labour is recognised as economically and culturally valuable. When women began teaching women within creative disciplines, arts education increasingly ceased to be treated as a viable and respected career pathway.

A future-facing Cultural Policy must recognise creative arts education and craft practice as essential national cultural infrastructure. Investment in arts education at

every stage of learning is not only an investment in cultural participation, but in social cohesion, wellbeing, gender equity, and Australia's creative future.