



Art Education Australia (AEA)

Submission to the Public Consultation: Towards a New National Cultural Policy (2026)

Email submission: culturalpolicy@arts.gov.au

May 2026

Submitted by: Dr Kathryn Coleman, President, Art Education Australia (AEA)



Executive Summary

Art Education Australia (AEA) strongly supports the continuation and renewal of the National Cultural Policy under the Revive framework. We recognise the significant achievements of Revive, including the establishment of Creative Australia, investment in national cultural institutions, and renewed recognition of artists as workers within Australia’s cultural and economic life.

AEA’s position is consistent with broader sector concerns regarding the sustainability of arts education pathways.

This submission provides a discipline-specific perspective, demonstrating how visual arts education functions as essential cultural infrastructure; a system that produces artists, audiences and the broader creative workforce.

Cultural policy can respond to current challenges by recognising that young people are central to future cultural participation patterns. Visual arts education underpins Australia’s future global cultural presence by developing internationally capable creative practitioners.

Without sustained, coordinated investment in visual arts education, the ambitions of Revive cannot be fully realised, particularly in relation to participation, workforce development and equitable access.

Visual Arts Education as Cultural Infrastructure

AEA asserts that visual arts education must be understood as:

- The primary site of equitable access to arts and culture (schools)
- The origin point of cultural participation (early childhood through schooling)
- The pipeline into the creative workforce
- A mechanism for cultural continuity, especially for First Nations knowledge systems

Current policy settings create a structural gap between aspiration and delivery. While Revive depends on participation, audiences, and artists, the system that produces them - arts education - remains under-embedded and fragmented across portfolios. In a context of rapid digital transformation and changing patterns of cultural participation, visual arts education provides a scalable and future-facing foundation for Australia’s cultural life.

System Context

AEA identifies the following systemic challenges and emerging risks across the cultural ecosystem:

- Senior secondary Arts participation has declined by ~21% (2015–2023)
- Over 50 Creative Arts university programs have closed since 2018
- Access remains inequitable, especially in regional and low-SES contexts
- Up to 26% of Arts classes are taught out-of-field.

These are not isolated issues, they reflect pipeline failure across schooling, tertiary education and workforce supply.

Key Recommendations

Pillar 1 First Nations First

AEA strongly affirms First Nations cultural authority as foundational to all arts education.

Cultural policy can respond by:

- Sustained funding for First Nations-led visual arts education across schooling and community contexts
- Including the central role of language in cultural transmission and visual arts practice
- Embedding two-way learning models in all arts-in-schools programs
- Formalising remunerated partnerships with Elders, community educators and First Nations artists
- Supporting First Nations pathways into visual arts teacher education and cultural leadership

This responds to sector-wide evidence that call to embed First Nations leadership structurally across curriculum, training and workforce pathways.

Pillar 2 A Place for Every Story

AEA emphasises that the ability to create and share stories depends on clear, accessible and sustained pathways into and through visual arts education.

Cultural policy can respond by:

- Undertaking a national audit of visual arts education pathways from early childhood through schooling, tertiary education and into the creative workforce
- Investing in equitable access to visual arts education for regional, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD), disabled and low socio-economic communities
- Strengthening sustained partnerships between schools, cultural institutions and communities to support locally relevant and place-responsive practice
- Expanding artist–student residencies and collaborative programs aligned with the Australian Curriculum
- Recognising and supporting contemporary forms of visual arts practice, including:
 - digital visual culture
 - hybrid and online creative production
 - student-led digital and participatory practices

This responds to sector-wide evidence that access to arts education is too often shaped by postcode rather than entitlement, limiting who is able to contribute to and participate in Australia’s cultural story.

Pillar 3 Centrality of the Artist

AEA endorses recognition of artists as workers, but extends this:

Artists are educators, and educators are cultural workers.

Cultural policy can respond by:

- Introduction of a Teaching Artist Wage Standard
- Protection of creative rights, authorship and intellectual property in digital and AI-mediated environments
- Recognition of teaching artists as part of the national creative workforce
- HECS/fee relief incentives for artists entering teaching pathways
- Expansion of artist-in-residence and school-based programs (as complements, not substitutes for teachers)
- Including protection of creative rights in digital and AI-mediated environments
- Recognising portfolio careers across education, industry and digital practice

This responds to sector-wide evidence that we must strengthen workforce pipelines and addressing shortages.

Pillar 4 Strong Cultural Infrastructure

AEA extends the definition of infrastructure:

Schools represent Australia's most distributed, scalable and equitable cultural infrastructure network, particularly in regional, remote and outer-urban communities.

Cultural policy can respond by:

- Formal recognition of schools as cultural hubs, particularly in regional and remote areas
- Investment in visual arts technical-digital-creative infrastructure including Technical assistance for visual arts teachers
- Long-term funding for visual arts education-outreach within cultural institutions
- Analysis of systemic decline across tertiary and institutional infrastructure

This responds to sector-wide evidence that arts education institutions are core infrastructure, not peripheral systems.

Pillar 5 Engaging the Audience

AEA reframes audience development - audiences are not built later; they are formed through sustained engagement in arts education.

Young people are not only future audiences, but active participants in cultural life whose modes of engagement particularly through digital and hybrid platforms are reshaping how culture is created, discovered and shared.

Cultural policy can respond by:

- Funding youth-led exhibition, production and curation platforms that position young people as active contributors to Australia's cultural life
- Ensuring all national cultural institutions deliver resources that are:
 - free and equitably accessible

This submission has been collaboratively developed and endorsed by the Art Education Australia (AEA) Executive and Committee 4



- curriculum-aligned
- hybrid (digital and in-person)
- designed to support contemporary discovery pathways, including how young people encounter, interpret and share culture across digital platforms
- Embedding sustained partnerships between schools and cultural institutions to enable place-responsive, ongoing engagement rather than episodic access
- Positioning young people as:
 - creators
 - curators
 - critics

This approach recognises that audience engagement is not incidental, but developed through early, sustained participation in arts learning. It also reflects changing patterns of cultural engagement, where discovery, participation and creation are increasingly interconnected.

Sixth Pillar

AEA supports the establishment of a sixth pillar to provide a structural mechanism that enables the existing five pillars to be realised and sustained. This is not simply an addition; it functions as a structural mechanism to realise and sustain the five existing pillars.

This sixth pillar is necessary to realise and sustain the five existing pillars by providing the enabling conditions for participation, workforce development and cultural continuity. Without it:

- policy remains fragmented across portfolios
- access remains inequitable
- workforce shortages worsen
- Revive’s ambitions cannot be achieved

AEA recommends:

- Establishment of Pillar 6 – Arts Learning, Training and Pathways
- A National Inquiry into Arts Education
- A National Arts Education Strategy (10-year)
- A joint Arts–Education governance mechanism
- Dedicated cross-portfolio staff and structures to ensure coordination across departments, supporting coherent communication, research, and program delivery

Arts education provides the enabling conditions for participation, workforce development and cultural continuity across the cultural ecosystem.

AEA proposes a staged implementation

2026–27

- Specialist Visual Arts Teacher Fellowships
- Teaching Artist Wage Standard pilots

2028–29

- National rollout of Visual Arts technical-digital-creative infrastructure
- Monitoring of participation, access and equity outcomes through national indicators

By 2030

- 25% reduction in arts teacher shortages
- Universal access to institutional arts education resources

AEA emphasises that:

- Arts education is not a downstream outcome of cultural policy
- It is the precondition for cultural life

Without it:

- there are no future artists
- no sustainable audiences
- no equitable cultural participation

As the Government reviews *Revive* and develops its next National Cultural Policy, Art Education Australia (AEA) affirms that visual arts education is not an add-on, but core cultural infrastructure.

Arts education is not a downstream outcome of cultural policy; it is the precondition for cultural life. Without it, there are no future artists, no sustainable audiences, and no equitable participation.

AEA stands ready to partner with government, First Nations communities, educators and the cultural sector to ensure that Australia's next National Cultural Policy recognises, embeds and invests in arts education as central to Australia's cultural future.