

## National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Individual

Jess Zlotnick



Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

To the Ministry for the Arts, and the Honourable Tony Burke,

My name is Jess Zlotnick. I'm a writer based in Sydney. I am eager to contribute my perspective to the redevelopment of the National Cultural Policy. Artists are the custodians of our cultural voice, and it's vital that strategies about arts and theatre in particular are informed by the experience and expertise of those artists.

I am an artist who has, for the last ten years, not been employed as an artist. I've never been able to sustain my life on my art, and have worked full time in retail and arts administration to make ends meet. I'm employed as the Artistic Administrator and Company Manager at Belvoir Street Theatre, and previously worked for Sydney Theatre Company in the administrative branch too.

These descriptors only capture half my life: what I can't capture in neat titles and hours of work is my freelance career as a writer, dramaturg, and producer. I work another job in the evening, rehearsing shows, writing or editing plays, attending other artists' work to provide notes or support. I have funded (out of pocket) editors for my scripts, assessments, developments, and venue costs. The mental load of progressing my artistic career is unquantifiable.

It is, plainly, impossible to be a full time artist without some other employment relieving the pressure of earning a living wage.

It's also true that artists will continue to make art, even in the most fraught conditions, because they cannot live any other way.

My recommendations:

### Fund Art Like Sport

I worked in the education sector at a theatre company. Arts education is vanishing under pressures to deliver profit. If the arts were funded like sport, and its inclusion seen as fundamental to a healthy upbringing, this would be an investment in that shows the arts are essential to the cultural life of all Australians.

### 2. Universal Basic Income for Artists

I worked on shows where artists were not able to accept roles as they would be making a sacrifice to their income that was not feasible for their responsibilities as rent payers or caregivers. The pilot program providing Universal Basic Income for Artists in Ireland has shown that arming artists with a living wage protects their labour by investing in it.

### 3. Access to Space

Venue hire rates are at a commercial level that independent artists cannot afford. Work I've presented has had limited seasons (2 or 3 shows only), or compromises on the work due to the budget going towards venue hire. Subsidising venue rental costs for independent artists would allow artists to focus their resources into the art itself.

There isn't a world where I cease to make theatre because it's difficult to do so. But my resilience is borne of a privilege that not everyone has access to, my collaborators are disappearing because of the difficulties, and there is a concerning gap in the young artists and audiences who will be future theatre-makers and goers.

