

I am a freelance designer for live performance, an educator in design and a volunteer in an industry guild dedicated to supporting designers for live performance and screen. Conditions have deteriorated for theatre designers as the subsidised theatre model is collapsing and fees and budgets have not increased with CPI. Designers are not covered by an Industry Award, so pay and conditions are not protected and many live performance designers are chronically underpaid for their work.

I think it is great that the Federal Government is putting the effort into building a coherent Arts policy through Create, and the Pillars provide a clear structure for thinking strategically about what needs to be done.

Pillar 1 - provide targeted and diverse training opportunities for first nations secondary students who show potential as theatre artists. These people are not currently being served by conventional arts training institutions and courses.

Pillar 2 – set up a funded program of artist-led diverse mini-stories that can be loaded into an easily-accessible online format, similar to TikTok, with a searchable platform, funding for an editor/moderator and funding to pay artists for their submission.

Arts in schools should be funded like sport, with a dedicated program to develop artistic talent and artistic awareness/appreciation, from primary through to tertiary education.

Pillar 3. Ministers of all persuasions should publicly and often acknowledge the value of art and artists.

The ATO status of the artist is not clear. Producers often use the confusion relating to the status of designers working in theatre, defining them as 'contractors' rather than sole traders to force unfair conditions. Clarifying this ATO definition to take account of the perilous and underpaid work of designers would help to make our industry fairer.

Define company obligations for designers to be covered by the company insurances when they are working within the company structure as a freelance artist. More companies now require designers to take out their own insurances, however fees have not increased to enable them to do this. Consequently, the insurance status of designers when at work within a company or at a venue is not regulated.

Continue to strengthen copyright laws applicable to AI so as to protect the creative contribution and copyright of artists.

Develop strategies to support diversity and eliminate unequal pay and conditions, especially for female designers. Protect designers from working unpaid long hours.

The government should set up a Commission of Enquiry into a universal salary for artists as a way of funding the artist with a fair living wage, rather than just funding arts institutions.

Tax law should be revised to exempt grants, fellowships and prizes from income tax as some scientific awards do.

Pillar 4 – Many theatre companies are fragile, laying off staff and struggling with declining audiences. Longer term funding strategies that set clear goals for employing Australian theatre artists should be established.

Subsidised companies should be required to employ Australian artists. The Australian Ballet, for example employs very few Australian designers.

An Australian arts culture would be made stronger if it was built on sustainable principles and action on Climate Change. Sustainability goals should be built into arts policies as a standard component of key indicators.

Initiate a 12 month review of the not for profit theatre sector to provide real data on conditions.