



# L2R Dance Submission to the National Cultural Policy Consultation

## About L2R Dance

L2R Dance is Australia's only youth street dance not-for-profit and social enterprise, based in Melbourne's west. Since 2009, we have worked with more than 24,400 young people aged 6–25 and delivered more than 4,288 free dance classes.

Our work is grounded in the history and culture of hip hop and street dance and focuses on removing barriers to arts participation for children and young people from culturally diverse and underrepresented communities.

In 2025, L2R Dance:

- Engaged 1,511 young people through free workshops and school programs;
- Delivered 418 free dance classes;
- Employed 44 young artists from Melbourne's west;
- Delivered 864 hours of paid internships; and
- Paid more than \$166,000 directly to young artists.

L2R's participant base reflects the diversity of Melbourne's west, with 56% of participants speaking a language other than English at home and more than 20 cultural groups represented across our programs.

## Challenges

Children and young people have the right to play, to access culture, to self-expressions and to engage with rigorous and complex performing art. Not only does art created for and with and by children and young people have intrinsic impact, but it also has an evidenced impact on their holistic selves, on community cohesion, mental health and well-being, and on their sense of possibility and view of the world.

Children and young people are marginalised groups, and often neglected in an adult-focused world. They have little opportunity to express their voice or to assert power. They are often doubly marginalised by societal structures and systems that fail to adequately recognise and address their unique needs and rights. They are a deeply intersectional demographic. The ages of 0 - 24 make up 30% of Australia's population.

### Participation in the arts is decreasing

The [ABS has reported](#) a concerning decrease in children's creative participation and attendance between 2017-18 and 2021-22.

- 59% of children participated in a creative activity, down from 63%.
- Attendance at cultural venues or events among children fell from 94% to 80%, with attendance at at least one performing arts event dropping from 57% to 31%.

Participation in arts and culture supports confidence, social connection, self-expression, wellbeing and educational engagement. Reduced access to creative experiences risks long-term impacts on community cohesion, youth wellbeing and future cultural participation. At the same time, cost-of-living pressures are making arts participation increasingly inaccessible for many Australian families. Affordability, transport and geographic inequity are major barriers to participation for children and young people, particularly in outer suburban and regional communities.



## Young people need stronger offline spaces for connection and belonging

Young people are experiencing increasing mental health and wellbeing challenges.

- 38.8% of people aged 16–24 self-report poor mental health and wellbeing ([ABS](#))
- 1 in 7 children and adolescents experience mental illness each year ([AIHW](#))

Australia is also entering a new policy environment following the introduction of the national social media ban for children under 16, driven by growing concerns around online harms, social isolation and the impacts of digital environments on young people's development and wellbeing. This national conversation highlights the increasing importance of accessible real-world spaces where young people can gather, connect, express themselves creatively and build a sense of identity and belonging outside digital platforms.

## Workforce shortages and unsustainable careers continue to impact the sector

In 2024, 71% of TNA member organisations said they are still being affected by the production and technical workforce shortage. In 2025, [59% independent artists were considering leaving a career in the arts](#) (up from 51% in 2022), and 55% said are still impacted by COVID-19, but without the financial safety nets that were in place during the pandemic.

## The sector continues to grapple with changing audience behaviours and uneven recovery patterns following COVID-19

While [Live Performance Australia's 2024 Attendance and Revenue Report](#) shows overall industry attendance and revenue have recovered strongly, growth has been concentrated in major commercial and contemporary music events rather than evenly across the performing arts sector. Smaller organisations and culturally specific sectors continue to face challenges around audience development, rising operating costs, and long-term sustainability.

## The Children, Young People and the Arts (CYPA) sector continues to struggle from inequitable investment

This leads to poor salaries and working conditions, and limited capacity and growth. Without stronger and more coordinated public investment, Australia risks losing organisations, artists and community leaders that are already delivering significant cultural and social outcomes for children and young people.

## Street dance is culturally significant but structurally under-recognised

ABS data shows that [13% of children aged 5–14 participated in dancing](#) outside school hours in 2021–22, while AusPlay data consistently identifies dance among the major organised physical activities for Australian children. Despite this, dance is often under-recognised in cultural policy, particularly beyond ballet and contemporary practice.

Street dance and hip-hop culture are major forms of cultural participation for culturally diverse young people and communities, particularly in metropolitan and outer suburban areas. Despite this, street dance continues to sit between arts, sport, recreation and youth sectors, creating gaps in funding, infrastructure and policy recognition.

## Opportunities

### Arts and culture can deliver more through whole-of-government action

The next National Cultural Policy can move beyond arts-only investment and activate culture across government priorities, particularly health, education, youth, multicultural affairs, employment and social cohesion. *REVIVE* began this work through initiatives across education, workplace safety, disability, mental health and First Nations portfolios; the next policy should turn that into a clearer whole-of-government framework. Kate Larsen similarly argues that the renewed policy should [embed commitments across portfolios and create mechanisms for genuine cross-government collaboration](#).

For L2R, this is a practical opportunity. Community-based dance programs support physical activity, confidence, belonging, cultural connection, youth employment and education engagement. Cross-portfolio activation would increase impact, reduce duplication and help public investment reach young people and families through the



systems they already use: schools, local government, health promotion, youth services and community organisations.

### **Arts and culture are civic and social infrastructure**

[A New Approach's The Big Picture](#) shows that Australian governments invested \$8.6 billion in arts and culture in 2023–24, but investment is not keeping pace with population growth or comparable OECD countries. Federal investment was \$114 per capita, the lowest on record, while state and territory expenditure outpaced federal investment for the first time.

This creates an opportunity for the National Cultural Policy to reframe arts and culture as essential civic infrastructure, not discretionary activity. For children and young people, community arts programs provide the “soft infrastructure” of trusted adults, peer connection, creative expression, cultural identity and safe places to gather. This is particularly important in outer suburban communities where cultural infrastructure is often limited, and families face cost and transport barriers.

### **Dance reaches young people and communities that policy often struggles to reach**

Dance is already a powerful access point for children and young people, particularly those who may not connect with traditional arts institutions, organised sport or formal classroom settings. Dance can support young people to learn in different ways that traditional systems do not always support.

[Creative Australia's Street Dance in Focus](#) demonstrates that street dance is highly diverse, youth-oriented and community-based: 64% of respondents identify as culturally and linguistically diverse, 42% were born outside Australia, and 82% are under 35. This aligns strongly with L2R's work in Melbourne's west, where 56% of participants speak a language other than English at home.

The opportunity is not only to “include” these communities in existing cultural systems, but to recognise the cultural forms they already value, practise and lead.

### **Street dance is already generating cultural participation, employment and leadership**

Street dance is not simply recreational activity. [Creative Australia](#) found that 92% of surveyed street dance respondents identify as active community participants, 33% work as educators or teachers, 23% work as event producers or managers, and 35% engage in paid street dance work.

Street dancers are also highly engaged arts participants: 89% attend arts and creative activities outside street dance. This demonstrates that investment in street dance can support broader arts participation, audience development and creative workforce pathways.

L2R's own work shows this in practice. In 2025, L2R employed 44 young artists from Melbourne's west, delivered 864 hours of paid internships, and paid more than \$166,000 directly to young artists.

### **Schools and communities can become stronger access points for culture**

There is a clear opportunity to reconnect children and young people with arts and culture through schools and community settings. L2R wants to see dance back and supported in primary and secondary education, particularly in communities where young people face financial, geographic and cultural barriers to participation.

[Theatre Network Australia](#) has previously recommended a national Creative Schools initiative modelled on Sporting Schools, alongside an arts access subsidy modelled on PACER. L2R supports these practical mechanisms because they would reduce costs for families and schools, create paid work for artists, strengthen local arts organisations, and make arts participation part of everyday life for children and young people.

## **What Matters to L2R Dance**

### **Children and young people as cultural citizens**

Children and young people are not simply future audiences or future creative workers; they are cultural citizens now. They have the right to access culture, participate in creative expression, tell their own stories and shape Australia's



cultural future. L2R sees young people as artists, leaders and contributors in the present, not simply participants to be engaged.

### **Free and equitable access to arts and culture**

Access to arts and culture remains deeply unequal. Too many children and young people miss out because of cost, transport, geography or cultural exclusion. L2R believes access to creative expression, joy and cultural connection should not depend on a family's ability to pay. Free and low-cost community arts programs are essential infrastructure for inclusive communities.

### **Dance in education**

L2R wants to see dance back and supported in primary and secondary education, particularly in communities where young people face financial, geographic and cultural barriers to participation.

Dance can support young people to learn in different ways that traditional systems do not always support. It builds confidence, creativity, communication, physical wellbeing and connection, while providing alternative ways for young people to engage with learning, identity and community.

### **Dance is more than ballet and contemporary**

Dance should be recognised in its full breadth, including but not limited to, cultural dance, street dance, hip hop, breaking, Afro dance, dancehall, waacking, krump, vogue, locking, popping, lifesteet and house. These are not simply youth engagement tools. They are artistic and cultural practices with histories, lineages, disciplines and communities. Recognising dance properly means recognising the forms young people already practise, value and use to express who they are.

### **Authenticity, cultural integrity and community leadership**

L2R's work is grounded in the street dance ethos of "each one teach one". We honour the cultural protocols, histories and pioneers of street dance culture in all aspects of our work. Community-led and culturally specific practices should be recognised as important artistic and cultural practices in their own right, with investment supporting lived experience leadership, cultural safety and long-term community relationships.

### **Long-term pathways, not one-off engagement**

L2R's programs are designed as long-term pathways where young people can move from participation into mentoring, internships, paid employment and leadership. This work is relational, community-led and built over time. Success is not only measured by participation numbers, but by whether young people can imagine sustainable futures for themselves in culture, creativity and community leadership.

## **Recommendations for the New National Cultural Policy**

There are strategic opportunities for new policy and investment that address multiple key issues for the performing arts sector at once, while also providing value to children, young people and families. This includes:

- **For Schools:** Providing subsidies and grants to schools alleviates staffing and budget pressures for schools, improves educational offerings, and connects them with arts and cultural organisations.
- **For Teachers:** Professional development and reduced workload burdens.
- **For Children, Young People and Families:** More equitable and affordable access to arts and culture, availability of new and different local offerings, increased exposure to culture.
- **For Creative Organisations:** Creates increased flow-on revenue, generates new partnerships, contributes to long-term audience/market development which boosts future audience numbers.
- **For Creative Workers:** Provides more employment opportunities, creates better working conditions, supports pathways and development for emerging practitioners, and provides ongoing sector development and support – all essential for career sustainability.

### **1. Recognise children and young people as a national cultural priority**

The next National Cultural Policy should explicitly recognise children and young people as cultural citizens and embed children and young people as a priority cohort across all pillars of the policy.



This recommendation strongly aligns with all five pillars of the policy and reflects longstanding advocacy from Theatre Network Australia and the broader children and young people arts sector.

The next National Cultural Policy should **establish a dedicated children and young people arts strategy under the National Cultural Policy, led by Creative Australia**. The strategy should include significant investment in **project funding, fellowship funding, and a multi-year operational investment program for children and young people arts organisations**

Recognising children and young people as a national cultural priority would strengthen long-term cultural participation, improve equity of access and better align cultural policy with broader government priorities relating to wellbeing, education and social cohesion.

## **2. Recognise dance, including street dance, as a significant Australian cultural practice**

The next National Cultural Policy should explicitly recognise dance as a major part of Australia's contemporary cultural life, including street dance and hip-hop culture. This recommendation aligns with Revive Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story and Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience by ensuring national cultural policy reflects contemporary participation and culturally diverse creative practice. Greater recognition of dance would improve representation, strengthen cultural inclusion and ensure Australia's cultural systems better reflect how young people engage with culture today.

## **3. Fund An arts access subsidy program for schools modelled on the Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER)**

An Arts Access Subsidy Program will increase equitable access to arts and cultural experiences for Australian schoolchildren, from Prep to Year 12, by addressing financial barriers to participation. It is inspired by the successful [Parliament and Civics Education Rebate \(PACER\) Program](#), which encourages school visits to significant parliamentary and civic sites. This program would similarly subsidise travel, tickets, and access costs for arts-related excursions, enhancing exposure to theatre, galleries, museums, festivals, and libraries.

**Children and young people deserve cultural equity:** Many schools, particularly in regional, rural, and disadvantaged urban areas, struggle to fund arts excursions due to transport costs, ticket prices, and accessibility needs. This often results in limited arts and cultural engagement for students who stand to benefit the most.

**Arts and cultural engagement will enhance educational outcomes:** Exposure to the arts has been linked to improved cognitive skills, creative thinking, social awareness, and emotional well-being, directly aligning with educational goals outlined in the Australian Curriculum.

**The program provides support for the arts ecosystem:** By subsidising school visits, the program will stimulate demand for arts organisations and venues, providing vital revenue streams and increasing the visibility of Australian cultural institutions.

**This program addresses cross-portfolio objectives** in education, social inclusion, and regional development. It underscores a commitment to ensuring that every Australian child, regardless of location or socioeconomic status, has the opportunity to experience the transformative power of arts and culture.

### **Program Design**

1. **Eligibility:** All registered Australian schools, including government, independent, and Catholic schools, would be eligible to apply for subsidies. Priority would be given to schools from low socioeconomic areas and regional or remote locations.
2. **Subsidy Components:**
  - **Transport Costs:** Covering buses or other travel modes to and from arts venues.
  - **Ticket Discounts:** Reducing the cost of admission for performances, exhibitions, or events.
  - **Accessibility Support:** Funding for specialised transport or assistance for students with disabilities.
3. **Funding Allocation:** Rebates calculated on a per-student basis, with potential for capped annual funding per school to ensure broad participation.



4. **Administration:** Managed by the Department of Education in collaboration with Creative Australia, using streamlined application and reimbursement processes akin to PACER.

#### 4. Fund a national Creative Schools program modelled on Sporting Schools

One of the reasons that many Australian schools are unable to fulfil the requirements of the Australian Curriculum: The Arts is the shortage or unavailability of qualified/experience teaching staff. Schools must often rely on external providers to provide arts engagement opportunities for their students, and then only if their budgets allow for it, leading many students, particularly in regional Australia, to miss out.

Creative Schools is a proposed Federal program that would be delivered by the Department of Education in collaboration with the Office for the Arts and Creative Australia, which would partner with local arts organisations to help schools increase children and young people's participation in the arts and connect them with community arts opportunities. This is based on the existing Sporting Schools program.

[Sporting Schools](#) is an Australian Government initiative designed to help schools increase children's participation in sport and connect them with community sport opportunities. Sporting Schools programs are provided free to children and their families to help students build the confidence and capability to be active for life. To help achieve this, Sport Australia has partnered with more than 35 national sporting organisations (NSOs).

Grants of between \$1,000 and \$3,600 are available per primary school for each term, and schools use these funds to engage the NSOs to deliver sports activities for students. This ensures students have access to free, high-quality sport programs at school, establishes partnerships between sporting organisations and schools to promote involvement in sport outside of school, and builds capabilities in both schoolteachers and coaches in the sport workforce.

**This is an excellent youth engagement model because it provides accessible services for young people in spaces they already attend, connects schools and young people with community organisations, gives agency to schools and local communities, and is a cost- and resource-effective, devolved method of government spending.** Creative Schools would ease pressures on schools trying to comply with the arts curriculum, and address workforce issues by both providing employment and strengthening early stages of the talent pipeline.

#### 5. Reinstate Creative Australia's ArtStart program

[ArtStart](#) was a program by Creative Australia, which was available to recent creative arts graduates to support a career or business development strategy for their arts practice. Between 2009 and 2015 grants of \$10,000 were given to young artists wanting to establish a career as a professional artist, until the [program had to be cut](#) after the government at the time dramatically reduced Creative Australia's budget.

A [longitudinal study of early career artists](#) by the Creative Australia found that ArtStart recipients spent more time on their practice and earned a higher proportion of their income than non-recipients. It also found recipients had more confidence in their career, felt their artistic practice met or exceeded their expectations, and saw a large increase in their network of contacts after receiving their grant.

**ArtStart is a proven, cost-effective program model for developing a secure arts workforce**, the absence of which has contributed to the skills shortages and workforce decline that the sector is experiencing today. It's reinstatement via additional investment in Creative Australia will be welcomed by the sector.

### Submission by

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