

We are writing as the CEOs of three unique, and in many ways aligned, cultural organisations. Heaps Decent, Red Room Poetry and Story Factory are NSW-based organisations focused on creative learning. We provide opportunities for young people to find their voice and participate in the arts. Collectively, over 16,000 young people in Australia participated in our programs last year.

Access to the arts and creative engagement in Australia is far from a universal or equitable provision. Our work tries to address this and contributes to *Revive's* A Place for Every Story and Centrality of the Artist pillars.

*Revive* has delivered important benefits to the arts sector. However, the federal government's Arts strategy is undermined by its Education strategy, which has reduced cultural participation over the last ten years through the financial emphasis on STEM following the 2016 National STEM School Education Strategy and the Job-Ready Graduate reforms of 2020. The consequences are well known, including a drop in ATAR arts enrolments of 21% between 2015 and 2023, and an increase of 42% in fees for creative arts courses in higher education between 2020 and 2026 (*Gattenhof & Saunders, 2026*).

For those of us working with young people in and outside schools, the federal government gives with one hand, but takes away with another. Unfortunately, the giving hand holds less. For instance: *Revive* dedicated \$2.6 million to in-school arts initiatives. This was welcome, but over the same period, the government invested \$75.6 million for STEM initiatives (*Gattenhof & Saunders, 2026*).

Through our work, we are also conscious of the many people who are already outside, or only loosely connected to, formal education systems. Our organisations work in the gaps: youth justice centres, regional and remote communities, and young people experiencing different forms of disadvantage. Creative expression contributes to individual and community wellbeing and potential, yet structured programs are few and far between.

We have two recommendations for the next cultural policy:

1. **Please address the policy contradiction between the federal government's Education and Arts strategies.** This might include:
  - a. Supporting a national parliamentary inquiry into Arts education (as proposed by the NAAE).
  - b. Advocating for a National Creativity in Education Strategy to match the ambition of the 2016 National STEM School Education Strategy.
  - c. Advocating for the implementation of the recommendations of the Australian Universities Accord of 2024 to reverse the (unsuccessful) Job-Ready Graduates Package before it does further damage to the Humanities.
  - d. Creating a dedicated, multi-year federal fund for school and community education incursions in the form of practitioner-led programs and workshops.
  
2. **Create a dedicated multi-year Creative Learning Fund** for organisations wanting to deliver community learning programs and workshops. That can range from young people within or already outside formal education to adults who lack other opportunities to learn and participate. Such programs are rooted in trust and relationality, therefore we recommend multi-year grants to allow in-depth community engagement.

Thank you,

Dr Catherine Keenan AM, Executive Director and Co-Founder, Story Factory

Jonty Claypole MBE, CEO, Red Room Poetry

Thomas Peabody, CEO, Heaps Decent