

I am submitting my hopes for Australia's next National Cultural Policy, from several perspectives – as a freelance arts editor/writer, as a dance writer/advocate and as an employee of CACD organisation [REDACTED].

I have worked in arts journalism since 2007, as a freelance writer and critic, as editor of [REDACTED] and as founding editor of [REDACTED].

In the two decades I've been working in arts journalism I have watched coverage of the arts by mainstream media platforms steadily decline. Concurrently I have watched as remuneration for arts writers has, at best stagnated, but mostly declined. Not only is there barely any call for arts journalists any more, but the fees offered in no way reflect the time and skill required to be an arts journalist. As a case in point, at one publication my fee per review is the same as it was at the start of my career in 2007. At another, it is 25% lower. Like many arts journalists I have found myself a job in communications to be able to survive.

Arts journalism and arts criticism form a vital part of the arts ecosystem, serving the sector in multiple ways, and addressing in particular the pillars of the NCP relating to **Engaging the Audience, A Place for Every Story** and **Strong Cultural Infrastructure**, by:

- 1) Getting the word out: arts journalism connects artists to audiences, letting them know that shows are happening, giving them a sense of whether they might be interested in seeing a work.
- 2) Growing and diversifying audiences: arts journalism provides pathways into dance companies, artists, styles, forms that may be new or unfamiliar to members of the general public.
- 3) Creating a record of what happened: Arts journalism provides artists and companies with documentation of their work, and critical feedback. This is useful for publicising work, but also as evidence when applying for funding or acquitting funding.
- 4) Generating critical discourse: The critical conversations started by arts journalism help to ensure that dance keeps evolving and developing as an artform.
- 5) Providing independent assessment: Arts reviews provide funding bodies with an independent assessment of the work they're supporting.
- 6) Encouraging sponsors: Arts journalism is valued by sponsors, who want to see the work they're backing being publicised, talked about.

It is my fervent hope that the new National Cultural Policy will include strategies and resourcing to support the resuscitation of arts journalism and the vital role it plays in the arts sector.

As a dance writer and advocate for dance, I would like to see increased resourcing for dance, in particular career pathways and opportunities for independent choreographers. This relates in particular to Pillar 3: Centrality of the artist.

I recently interviewed a West Australian choreographer whose work has been recognised internationally three times, in addition to significant acclaim at home, and it took him, he said, approximately 13 attempts to fund the presentation of a recent work made in collaboration with another artist. This is someone whose work is excellent, who has a reputation for

making entertaining and accessible work, who is highly articulate, and yet he found it very challenging to find a platform to present his work. When it finally found a platform the work was shortlisted for a Green Room award.

The artist said that talking to other dance artists around the country, the common experience is that there are simply not enough opportunities available to create and present work. In particular he mentioned the decline in programs run by dance companies to platform work of independent choreographers, such as Sydney Dance Company's New Breed program, which, like so many others of its kind, is no longer running.

While this is one artist's story, as a dance writer who regularly speaks to artists, I can confirm that this is a common concern. I believe it is vital that the National Cultural Policy prioritises the creation of more opportunities for independent dance artists to create and present work. Independent dance artists play a vital role in the evolution of dance as an artform, having more freedom to experiment than larger mainstream organisations. To be able to do that experimentation they need more funded opportunities to make and present work.

My other concern in relation to opportunities for dance artists is how few Australian contemporary dance companies have the capacity to employ dancers full time. As far as I know only three companies – Sydney Dance Company, Bangarra Dance Theatre and Australian Dance Theatre – employ their dancers full time. The rest employ dancers on a project by project basis.

I think it is vital that our NCP prioritises increasing opportunities for full-time employment for contemporary dancers. Dancers employed project by project face financial instability, and also the challenge of maintaining technique and fitness whilst they are not on-project - both a financial issue, because it costs money to maintain these things if you're not provided them as part of a job, and a health and safety issue – most dancers can't afford to maintain their practice at the level required by a company when they're not employed year-round.

There are artistic implications too - a company that only has its dancers when they are needed for specific projects is not able to spend as much time on creative development as one that employs them full time. For these reasons I hope that the new NCP looks at how more companies can be resourced to provide full-time employment for dancers.

Since 2023 I have been working at [REDACTED], a community arts organisation. In this capacity, I also support the submission from the national alliance of Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) organisations and individuals:

<https://revivecommunityarts.com/statement/>

[REDACTED]