

AFTRS

Australian Film Television
and Radio School

AFTRS SUBMISSION TO NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY

May 2026

The Australian Film Television & Radio School (AFTRS) is the national screen and audio school, funded through the Department for the Arts.

AFTRS works closely with our national arts training colleagues, the Arts8, tackling common challenges, sharing resources and knowledge - in the pursuit of excellence in creative education. We believe creativity and the arts are vital to the lives of Australians as transforming and sustaining forces that promote understanding, compassion, recognition of difference and celebration of shared human experience.

Creativity is also an economic force - no more so than in times of industrial disruption - powered by essential workers. Australia's cultural and creative sector contributes over \$67 billion to the national economy and employs more than 590,000 people, representing around 2.5% of GDP (Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts).

AFTRS recognises the transformative impact of *Revive* (impacts of the policy on the School can be found in the Appendix), and during a time of great change and disruption, AFTRS applauds the government's prioritisation of a second cultural policy. We look forward to supporting its design and implementation.

FIRST NATIONS FIRST

Revive has set a clear national standard by placing First Nations First at the heart of Australia's cultural policy. The screen and cultural sectors have continued to reckon with what centring First Nations leadership, self-determination and cultural authority means in terms of actions and meaningful outcomes. This pillar has delivered tangible outcomes for AFTRS with the On Country Pathways Program, funded through *Revive*, that has delivered training to 124 First Nations creatives (106 of those outside of NSW) from over 50 Nations. The program was delivered on Country, in Gimuy / Cairns capturing participants from Torres Strait to Townsville, Bidyadanga Community (remote Western Australia) and Jigamy (regional NSW) in partnership with community, grounded in local knowledge systems and co-delivered by First Nations practitioners, AFTRS staff and community members.

Sector leadership with the recent First Nations Strategy Workshop at Uluru, attended by First Nations leaders from screen agencies, broadcasters and creative educators including AFTRS, under Rachel Perkins' stewardship in her role at Screen Australia, highlights this opportunity to move beyond time-limited programs towards sustained, coordinated frameworks where First Nations leadership across multiple institutions drives workforce development, talent progression and systemic change. The next phase of *Revive* offers the opportunity to consolidate these gains by scaling successful programs and strengthening collaboration across training providers, screen agencies and First Nations cultural organisations.

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- **Extension of the On Country Pathways** model nationally, supporting community-led training by, with and for First Nations communities across Australia.
- **Funding of CAAMA** - Screen agencies and AFTRS will partner with CAAMA to revitalise a seminal First Nations-led training organisation, strengthening First Nations storytelling capability, autonomy and leadership across generations. Out of the recent Uluru First Nations Strategy Workshop hosted by Screen Australia, the idea of the CAAMA model being replicated across other states was discussed and warmly received by attendees.

A PLACE FOR EVERY STORY

Creatives across Australia must be able to access the training they need to meet their ambitions and dreams - regardless of where they live or their socio-economic or cultural background. AFTRS applauds initiatives driven by *Revive* - like increased investment in regional arts and workforce development initiative - but for the School, access and equity remain pressing challenges in hands-on, practice-based creative education, where participation often requires technical experience, physical presence in metropolitan areas, and specialist facilities.

Housing affordability and relocation costs remain significant barriers to students studying in Australia's capital cities. For students who are studying in Sydney, it is now one of the world's most expensive rental cities. AFTRS was grateful to receive a \$500,000 grant from the Federal Government to scope and support accommodation for First Nations and financially disadvantaged students and is working closely with NIDA and the National Art School (NAS) on a scoping study to investigate longer term accommodation opportunities in Sydney.

The traditional conservatoire learning model, that prioritises intensive, hands-on training in professional environments, needs to be rethought so that flexible learning, including part-time and remote learning options, can be offered, without compromising learning outcomes. Recognition needs to be given to why students enter – or choose not to enter - creative education and the invisible barriers that exist to applying to national training institutions, including perceptions of talent, creative confidence, and career expectations. AFTRS' relationships with TAFEs in NSW and ACT through formal pathways and informal collaborations has transformed our student cohort - 25% of 2025 award offers were made to students entering via vocational qualifications.

- **Affordable Student Housing** - Use Commonwealth housing, infrastructure and arts policy levers—supported by philanthropic investment—to address the acute shortage of affordable student accommodation in metropolitan centres.
- **Strengthen national training pathways** across providers
 - Consider a single national TAFE body that can assist with coordination of TAFE and national training institution pathways
 - Establish clearer, credit-mapped progression into creative degrees, reducing duplication, cost and relocation risk for regional learners.

CENTRALITY OF THE ARTIST

Australia's leading creative training institutions deliver intensive, hands-on models of education that combine artistic ambition with technical excellence and audience-focused storytelling - capabilities

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that *Revive* identifies as central to Australia's cultural future. However, the operating environment for creative education is rapidly changing. Emerging technologies, particularly generative artificial intelligence, are reshaping creative practice, production processes and audience engagement at pace, while also raising complex questions about authorship, copyright, Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property, cultural safety and the ethical use of data. These shifts present opportunities to extend creative experimentation and access, but they also place new demands on educators to hold safe, empowering and critically informed learning environments.

- **A Graduate Certificate in Teaching Creative Practice** – national training institutions, including AFTRS, bring together their unique and tested approach to creative pedagogy in a teaching qualification that supports best practice teaching in creative classrooms across Australia, so Australia's future storytellers can engage confidently with change while sustaining trust, cultural integrity and creative excellence.
- **A National Centre of Excellence for AI and Creativity in Screen and Audio** - faced with the tech industry's vast R&D budgets and priorities that often sit at odds with our nation's storytellers, we propose a centre for creative innovation and exploration led by and centring human creativity, authorship, self-determination and ethics to level the playing field. The real value of the AI models is not the tech, nor the code: it's our original content, our data, our stories. This centre would bring together educators, academics, storytellers and industry to experiment with ethical ways to use AI to support Australian stories and creative workers, with real-world applications both in curriculum and production methods.

ENGAGING THE AUDIENCE

Revive has delivered important structural reforms to strengthen audience access to Australian stories, through Australian content obligations for streaming services and the increase to the Location Offset. This policy mix has driven rapid growth in screen and audio activity, at a time where audience behaviour and distribution, funding and production structures are shifting, creating new opportunities for engagement and employment but also fragmenting and complicating career pathways.

The sector needs to coordinate its approach to training and workforce development to make best use of limited resources to support this growth, and forge clear, joined-up pathways for job-ready, skilled graduates into both entry level and mid-level careers. There is great potential for Location Offset training funding to flow through and build the training ecosystem. However, it is currently simpler for productions to promote individuals and mentor entry level positions, than invest in structured training that impacts the sector and provides the combination of hard and soft skills to sustain careers in this environment. Reliance on disconnected, production-by-production training responses risks uneven outcomes and inefficiencies.

- **Implementation of a National Training Framework**, informed by the findings of Screen Australia's Production Infrastructure and Capacity Analysis (PICA), that brings together government, training providers and industry, resourced through the Location Offset Training Requirements, and that establishes required standards, accountabilities and outcomes for any funded training program and offers a framework for effective industry-led deliverables.

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Appendix

Through *Revive's* commitment to “secure the future of our national collecting institutions and national arts training organisations” under the pillar of *Strong Cultural Infrastructure*, a financial sustainability review of the Arts8 organisations led to a significant increase in AFTRS' ongoing appropriation. The investment has stabilised workforce and operational pressures, allowing AFTRS to safeguard core teaching capability, strengthen organisational resilience, and continue upgrading its facilities and systems so the School can support Australian creatives into the future.

The School also received Commonwealth support through *Revive for a First Nations Bridging Program* and support for subsidised accommodation.

Through the *First Nations Bridging Program* grant, AFTRS has delivered two initiatives:

- *On Country Pathways Program (OCP)*- working in partnership with communities across Australia to co-design and deliver First Nations-led training that reflects the different needs of each community, to build career pathways for First Nations creative talent in remote, rural and regional communities. This has supported over 90 First Nations creatives, representing over 50 Nations, to receive tailored screen and audio training grounded in place, culture and community in Gimuy / Cairns, Bidyadanga Community (remote Western Australia) and Jigamy (regional NSW). In January 2026, OCP culminated in Gadigal Week, bringing 29 First Nations participants and facilitators from across the country to AFTRS' Sydney campus to extend their training and strengthen networks and pathways into the screen and audio industries. AFTRS is partnering with Netflix to offer two OCP participants pathway scholarships to study at AFTRS, which include a relocation and living allowance, short courses and mentorship.
- *A First Nations Skills Snapshot*, identifying gaps and opportunities for greater First Nations participation in the screen sector. This skills audit has engaged with over 50 First Nations practitioners through targeted surveys and interviews. The next phase is to complete an action plan working in collaboration with the First Nations teams from the federal and state screen agencies.

AFTRS received a \$500,000 grant from the Federal Government to support accommodation for First Nations and financially disadvantaged students through to FY2027–28.