

Submission to the National Cultural Policy consultation, Revive 2.0

Lesley Graham

May 2026

I acknowledge and pay respect to the Tasmanian Aboriginal Community as the traditional and original owners of lutruwita (Tasmania), and to all other First Peoples, as the enduring custodians of culture protecting the lands, seas, air and waterways. I pay respect to Elders past and present.

Background

This submission draws on qualitative analysis of 32 interviews across the youth dance and broader arts sector. It identifies key opportunities to strengthen the implementation and future development of *Revive* (Office of the Arts, 2023).

This project is a part of Lesley Graham's PhD; research which has been made possible through a Commonwealth Research Training Stipend ([REDACTED]).

The research project

The study seeks to understand the influence of policies that impact youth dance as a creative arts practice, and the organisations that are formed to support that practice. These policies may include those covering the arts and culture, children and youth, education, safety, access and inclusion, health and well-being, First Peoples, and multicultural perspectives.

Interviewees (creative leaders, managers, collaborators, participants and board members) have been asked to reflect on policies that have shaped the company/project/organisation and consider how these policies may have influenced the creative practice of their activity.

This study [REDACTED] has been approved by the [REDACTED] Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). [REDACTED]

Research Team

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Contact: [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Methodology and Early Analysis

This PHD project is in progress and is due to be completed mid 2027 using a Policy Ecology or Policy as Practice approach (Ball, 1993) (Ball et al., 2012) and further developed by Wortham (2023), as the primary analytical framework. This approach establishes a process of policy enactment, rather than policy implementation, treating policy as interpreted, negotiated and enacted differently across contexts. It directly supports analysing interviews rather than policy texts. The core idea behind this is that policy does not sit only in documents or government texts. It operates as an *ecology* (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) across formal policy (government, funding frameworks), organisational governance, funding systems, professional norms, embodied studio practices and relational decision-making. This approach allows me to analyse policy as *lived, enacted, negotiated and embodied*, which is exactly what interviewees are describing.

A strong companion framework is *Critical Cultural Policy Studies* (CCPS) through the work of Carol Bacchi (2009) and Bacchi and Goodwin (2016), which allows analysis of what youth dance policy assumes and how 'the problem' of youth arts is framed (or ignored). This is especially strong for analysing policy absence and funding logic and could be used to justify reading funding systems as value statements and analysing what is not said about youth arts.

Ozga (2000, 2011) also positions policy as discourse, governance and social practice, whilst being a helpful bridge between education, governance and cultural sectors. The core idea of CCPS understands policy as value-laden, historically situated, shaping cultural legitimacy and distributing resources unequally. It asks: '*Who is recognised? Who is funded? What kinds of practice are valued?*'.

Examples of the relevance of this approach are demonstrated in interviews such as where the participants explicitly critique:

- Professional vs youth practice hierarchies
- Funding competitiveness ("apples and oranges")
- Structural inequity between youth and professional companies
- The absence of youth from major national policy frameworks
- The framing of "excellence" and "professionalism"

Some key quotes in transcripts that signal CCPS applicability include:

- "Youth dance shouldn't be compared to professional companies"
- "It needs its own funding pool"
- "Panels are not neutral"
- "Revive missed youth"
- "Who the system is designed for" Such statements frame youth dance companies as structurally marginal, despite their central role in leadership pipelines in the sector.

Initial Findings / Early Analysis

Analysis of thirty-two interviews across youth dance practitioners, organisational leaders, and sector advocates is revealing a highly consistent account of youth dance practice in Australia, despite differences in geography, organisational scale, and professional role. Across the dataset, youth dance is positioned not simply as an artistic field, but as a practice embedded within broader systems of policy, education, and social provision. The findings indicate that youth dance operates under a set of structural conditions that simultaneously enable participation and constrain sustainability, shaping both creative practice and access.

1. Cultural Citizenship and Rights of Children and Young People

Across the interviews, participants consistently describe young people as active contributors to cultural life rather than passive recipients of artistic experiences. Youth dance is understood as a space in which voice, agency, and identity are developed through participation in creative processes. While these ideas are often expressed in terms of wellbeing or personal growth, the collective data suggests a deeper position: that young people have a legitimate claim to cultural participation. However, this position is not fully recognised within policy frameworks, which continue to situate children and young people primarily within education rather than as cultural citizens in their own right.

2. Policy Architecture and System Effects

A central finding is that many of the challenges faced by youth dance organisations arise from structural features of policy rather than isolated organisational issues. Participants identify persistent fragmentation between arts, education, and youth sectors, resulting in unclear responsibility for funding and support. Short-term funding models, combined with project-based structures, limit continuity and long-term impact. These conditions produce unintended outcomes, including the disappearance of sustained youth companies and programs, and the absorption of youth work into larger organisations, for whom it is not their major focus. Policy is therefore experienced not as an abstract influence but as a set of concrete conditions shaping what can be made, who can participate, and whether organisations can continue to operate.

3. Creative Practice in Youth Dance

Creative practice in youth dance is consistently described as co-creative and relational, involving negotiation between artistic direction and young people's contributions. Practitioners emphasise the importance of structure in enabling creativity, alongside responsiveness to participants' ideas. However, creative decisions are not independent of external pressures. Funding priorities, audience expectations, and resource limitations influence the scale, themes, and presentation of work. Creative practice therefore emerges as a negotiated process situated within, rather than separate from, policy contexts.

4. Organisational Sustainability and Governance

Organisational sustainability is a recurring concern across the interviews. Leaders describe unstable funding, limited staffing, and increasing administrative demands, particularly in relation to compliance and risk. Governance structures such as boards are seen as both supportive and constraining, providing accountability while adding complexity. These pressures are not framed as failures of organisational capability but as reflections of a broader system in which youth dance organisations are required to absorb risk and operate beyond their resourcing capacity.

5. Access, Inclusion and Participation

Access to youth dance is uneven and shaped by structural constraints including geography, cost, and institutional priorities. In response, organisations often extend their role beyond artistic production, acting as sites of connection, inclusion, and support for young people. Youth dance is particularly significant for those who do not engage easily in formal education contexts, offering a space for belonging and expression. In this sense, youth dance operates as a compensatory mechanism, addressing gaps in other systems rather than being fully supported as part of cultural infrastructure.

6. Risk, Regulation and Responsibility

Finally, the increasing influence of risk and regulation emerges as a defining feature of the sector. While child safety is widely accepted as essential, participants describe the expansion of risk to include reputational, organisational, and political dimensions. These considerations shape both organisational decision-making and creative practice, influencing what is possible within youth dance contexts. Risk management is therefore experienced not only as protection but also as a constraint on artistic exploration.

Summary of Initial Findings

Across the thirty-two interviews, youth dance emerges as a sector characterised by:

- strong commitment to young people's agency and participation,
- systemic policy misalignment and fragmentation,
- adaptive and responsive creative practices,
- organisational precarity rooted in structural conditions,
- and an increasing burden of risk management and responsibility.

Rather than functioning solely as an artistic domain, youth dance operates at the intersection of culture, education, social wellbeing, and policy frameworks. As such, the sector is best understood not as peripheral but as structurally embedded within broader debates about cultural access, equity, and the role of the arts in society. Taken together, these initial findings position youth dance as a field that is structurally constrained yet highly adaptive, operating at the intersection of artistic practice, social need, and policy conditions.

Gaps Identified in Revive Through Interview Findings

The initial findings from Transcripts 1–32 could inform the ongoing refinement of Australia’s National Cultural Policy. While *Revive* (Office of the Arts, 2023) establishes a comprehensive national framework across five pillars: First Nations First, A Place for Every Story, Centrality of the Artist, Strong Cultural Infrastructure, and Engaging the Audience, the findings from this study highlight a series of structural gaps that limit its capacity to fully support youth arts practice.

The initial analysis demonstrates that youth dance operates as a policy-conditioned cultural practice, shaped by funding models, institutional structures, and cross-sector disjunctions. These findings reveal that, despite *Revive*’s (Office of the Arts, 2023) commitment to access, participation, and cultural diversity, children and young people remain insufficiently integrated as a distinct policy cohort.

Cultural Citizenship and Policy Scope

The initial findings indicate that youth arts practice is underpinned by an implicit recognition of children and young people as active cultural participants with legitimate claims to artistic production. However, *Revive* frames participation broadly as a universal entitlement for “all Australians” without articulating a specific rights-based position for children and young people (Office of the Arts, 2023).

This limits the policy’s capacity to address youth participation as a matter of cultural citizenship, rather than access or audience development. Refinement of *Revive* requires a shift from general inclusion toward explicit recognition of children’s cultural rights, aligning with international frameworks and the lived realities of youth arts practice.

Policy Architecture and Cross-Sector Disjunction

A key initial finding across the dataset is the persistence of a structural divide between arts and education systems, resulting in fragmented responsibility and inconsistent access. While *Revive* (Office of the Arts, 2023) acknowledges that cultural policy operates across government domains, it does not resolve the operational mechanisms required for cross-portfolio integration.

This results in ongoing challenges for youth arts organisations, particularly in relation to school engagement, touring, and sustained program delivery. Policy refinement therefore requires the development of formalised cross-portfolio frameworks, including joint funding mechanisms and shared accountability structures between arts and education.

Organisational Sustainability and Infrastructure

Although *Revive* (Office of the Arts, 2023) recognises the need to strengthen cultural infrastructure and restore funding to under-resourced areas, the findings demonstrate that youth arts organisations continue to experience chronic precarity, driven by short-term funding and project-based models.

This indicates a mismatch between policy intention and sector experience. Youth arts require recognition as core cultural infrastructure, supported through sustained, multi-year investment rather than episodic project funding.

Creative Practice and Policy Conditions

The findings further demonstrate that policy settings shape not only organisational viability but also creative practice itself, influencing artistic scale, content, and participation. However, *Revive* does not explicitly acknowledge this relationship, focusing instead on artists as workers and creators within industry frameworks. (Office of the Arts, 2023)

Policy refinement should incorporate recognition of practice-based impacts, particularly in co-creative methodologies central to youth arts, ensuring that policy evaluation extends beyond outputs to include creative processes and artistic conditions.

Access, Equity, and Structural Barriers

While *Revive* emphasises equitable access to arts and culture (Office of the Arts, 2023), the findings demonstrate that participation remains uneven, shaped by geography, socioeconomic conditions, and institutional constraints. Youth arts organisations frequently function as compensatory systems, providing access where formal structures fall short.

This suggests the need to shift from access as availability toward equity as structural responsibility, with targeted investment addressing systemic barriers rather than general participation.

Risk, Regulation, and Creative Constraint

Finally, the expansion of regulatory and risk frameworks emerges as a defining feature of youth arts practice. Although *Revive* prioritises safe and inclusive workplaces (Office of the Arts, 2023), it does not fully address how risk regimes influence artistic decision-making and creative scope.

Policy refinement requires a more nuanced approach that balances child safety with the need to maintain artistic risk, experimentation, and critical engagement, particularly in youth contexts.

Conclusion

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that *Revive* provides a strong foundational framework (Office of the Arts, 2023) but requires further development to address the distinct structural position of youth arts. The refinement of the policy depends on recognising children and young people not only as participants or future audiences, but as present cultural actors whose creative, social, and artistic contributions are integral to Australia's cultural ecosystem.

Mapping Gaps to *Revive* Pillars

Gap	Revive Pillar	Existing Action	Critical Issue
No rights- based framework	Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story	Participation for all Australians	Lacks explicit recognition of children as cultural citizens
Access inequality		Inclusion and participation goals	Treats access as opportunity, not structural inequality
Arts/Education disconnect	Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist	Arts in Australian Curriculum as 5 disciplines	No mechanism for cross-portfolio coordination
Risk constraint		Safety frameworks	No consideration of suppression of artistic risk
Practice not recognised		Focus on artists as workers	Ignores policy impact on creative form/process
Weak youth infrastructure	Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure	Restores funding to Creative Australia	Funding not structurally directed to youth arts
Youth as future	Pillar 5 Engaging the Audience	Youth engagement & pathways	Not present: frames youth as audience/workforce, not as creators
Unintended policy effects	Cross-pillar	Broad ambitions	No system monitoring unintended outcomes

Recommendations for the National Cultural Policy consultation drawn from the Initial Findings

Recommendation 1: Recognise Children and Young People as Cultural Citizens

Current policy settings frame participation broadly but do not explicitly recognise children as cultural rights holders. Policy refinement should:

- Embed children's cultural rights within the policy framework
- Develop a dedicated youth arts strategy
- Support youth-led artistic production
- Consider a Pillar which targets children and young people

Recommendation 2: Address Structural Disconnection Between Arts and Education

The separation of arts and education systems continues to limit access. The policy should:

- Establish joint funding models between portfolios
- Create national frameworks for arts delivery in schools

- Support long-term partnerships with youth arts organisations
- Consider a Pillar which targets lifelong arts learning and teaching for all Australians (not just elite training)

Recommendation 3: Strengthen Youth Arts Infrastructure

Youth arts organisations require sustained investment. The policy should:

- Introduce multi-year funding streams
- Recognise youth arts as cultural infrastructure
- Restore long-term program continuity

Recommendation 4: Improve Policy Feedback and Evaluation

Policy outcomes are not always aligned with intent. The policy should:

- Introduce monitoring of unintended consequences
- Include sector feedback mechanisms
- Evaluate system-wide impacts, not only outputs
- Evaluate uptake of whole of government responsibility and delivery of *Revive* (Office of the Arts, 2023)

Recommendation 5: Recognise the Impact of Policy on Creative Practice

Policy directly shapes artistic outcomes. The policy should:

- Recognise co-creation and youth-led practice
- Evaluate creative processes as well as outputs
- Support diverse artistic methodologies
- Recognise children and young people as artists

Recommendation 6: Shift from Access to Equity

Participation remains uneven. The policy should:

- Target structural inequality
- Support regional and marginalised youth
- Support school-based pathways by delivering The Australian Curriculum: The Arts
- Support non-school-based pathways (youth arts and tertiary arts education)

Bio Lesley Graham

Lesley has dedicated over 40 years to dance and arts education. Based in lutruwita (Tasmania), she works as a freelance arts curriculum consultant, arts critic, audio describer, and is currently a PhD candidate at [REDACTED] looking at the impact of policy at international/national, state and local levels on creative practice, focusing on youth dance practice. Her career has focused on the connections between the arts, education, children, young people, and communities. Lesley has contributed her expertise through teaching, lecturing, research, and various freelance consultancies, voluntary governance, and sessional roles. She holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Visual Arts teaching) [REDACTED] and a Master of Dance Studies, [REDACTED] University of London.

Lesley is a regular contributor to Dance Australia and Arts Hub and serves as a dance sector representative for the National Advocates for Arts Education (NAAE) representing Australian Dance Council (Ausdance). She represents [REDACTED] on the Australian chapter of ASSITEJ, hosted by Theatre Network Australia, networking performing arts companies by, for and with young people. Lesley is also a member of the Tertiary Dance Council Australia TDCA hosted by Ausdance National. She has completed the Governance for Social Impact course through the Centre for Social Impact UNSW and has been the Chair of DRILL Performance Inc for the past [REDACTED]. Lesley has a strong commitment to improving diversity and have a particular interest and experience in child safety issues, supporting Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property rights, safe dance practice and access to current research methods and resources.

Endorsements

I endorse the following submissions to this consultation process:

- National Advocates for Arts Education (NAAE) Submission to the National Cultural Policy consultation May 2026
- Theatre Network Australia (TNA) Children, Young People and the Arts (CYPA) Advisory Group Submission to the National Cultural Policy consultation May 2026 (yet to see final version/s)
- CYPA coalition (all art forms) Next Generation Now: Embedding Children and Young People in Australia's Next National Cultural Policy Submission to the National Cultural Policy consultation May 2026

References

- Bacchi, C. (2009). *Analysing policy: What's the problem represented to be?* Pearson Education.
- Bacchi, C. L., & Goodwin, S. (2016). *Poststructural policy analysis: A guide to practice*. Palgrave Macmillan/Pivot.
- Ball, S. J. (1993). What is Policy? Texts, Trajectories and Toolboxes. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 13:(2), 10–17. Retrieved 07/07/2025, from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0159630930130203>
- Ball, S. J., Maguire, M., & Braun, A. (2012). *How Schools Do Policy: Policy Enactments in Secondary Schools*. Routledge.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development*. Harvard University Press.

Office of the Arts. (2023). *Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place-Australia's cultural policy for the next five years*. <https://www.arts.gov.au/publications/national-cultural-policy-revive-place-every-story-story-every-place>

Ozga, J. (2000). *Policy research in educational settings: Contested terrain*. Open University Press.

Ozga, J. (2011). Governing narratives: "Local" meanings and globalising education policy. *Education Inquiry*, 2(2), 305–318. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3402/edui.v2i2.21982>

Wortham, W. K., Rodwin, A. H., Purtle, J., Munson, M. R., & Raghavan, R. (2023). Revisiting the policy ecology framework for implementation of evidence-based practices in mental health settings. *Implementation Science*, 18(1).