

Arts8 Submission to the National Cultural Policy consultation 2026

Executive Summary

Revive (2023), the *Sustainability Review of the Arts8* (2023) and funding uplift has provided critical stabilisation for national training organisations, restoring capacity, infrastructure, workforce resilience, student wellbeing and culturally safe practice. While restorative, *Revive* alone cannot secure Australia’s cultural future. Declining arts education in schools, teacher shortages, rising training costs, weakened independent and small-to-medium sectors, fragmented approaches to arts education, and workforce shortages threaten the creative pipeline and long-term storytelling, participation and industry vitality.

Arts8 recommends the next version of the National Cultural Policy (NCP) move beyond stabilisation toward long-term cultural sustainability through stronger national coordination of arts education, training and workforce pathways. Priorities include embedding arts learning as essential cultural infrastructure, strengthening school-to-VET-tertiary-industry pathways, expanding paid apprenticeships and industry placements for technical roles, boosting support for independent and early-career sectors, and incentivising philanthropy with improved tax measures. NCP must centre First Nations leadership, equitable access, wellbeing supports and responses to emerging technologies such as generative AI. By integrating arts education across portfolios and investing in the broader cultural ecology, the next NCP can enable Australia’s artists, audiences and communities to thrive, safeguarding the nation’s creative capacity and cultural identity. Action is required urgently.

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About Arts8

Arts8 is a national collection of eight training organisations shaping Australia’s performing, screen and creative workforce to support a sustainable and thriving arts and cultural sector. Through intensive studio, stage and on-Country training, Arts8 supplies skilled artists and production practitioners to industry, supports community engagement and partnerships nationally, and advances the National Cultural Policy (NCP), *Revive*.

The Arts8 national training organisations are essential cultural infrastructure in Australia because they develop the skilled workforce and leadership needed to sustain vibrant creative industries, ensure equitable access to high-quality arts education across cities and regions, and support diverse cultural practices while fostering innovation. By linking training to industry standards, supporting pathways from education to employment, and partnering with communities and employers, the Arts8 strengthen the country’s cultural economy, promote social inclusion, and help ensure Australia’s stories and artistic expressions continue to thrive nationally and internationally.

National training organisations that comprise Arts8:

Australian Ballet School: Elite vocational training for classical ballet, preparing dancers for professional careers and life skills required in the dance profession.

Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS): National centre for screen and media education, developing industry-ready filmmakers, screen practitioners and media creatives.

Australian National Academy of Music (ANAM): Post-tertiary academy for elite classical musicians - where instrument mastery, innovative programming, professional collaborations and industry partnerships converge to forge skilled cultural leaders whose distinctive musical talents have global relevance.

Australian Youth Orchestra (AYO): National youth orchestra providing elite orchestral training and performance, connecting education, training and professional practice through national and international touring, partnerships, and school-based teacher training through Music in Me.

Flying Fruit Fly Circus (FFFC): The National Youth Circus, combining education, training and performance for young people, and supporting circus professionals at all stages of their career.

NAISDA: Leading First Nations arts training organisation creating and celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and wisdom through excellence, innovation and career pathways in nationally accredited dance and performing arts education.

National Institute of Circus Arts (NICA): NICA is Australia's Centre of Excellence in contemporary circus arts training, offering Australia's only accredited vocational and higher education circus programs, empowering performers, advancing creativity, inclusivity, and intellectual exploration.

National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA): Premier national training institute for acting, stagecraft, technicians and production—supplying theatre, film and TV, live event and interactive practitioners to the creative industries who are industry-ready and attain exceptional employability.

Introduction

Arts8 welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the continued development of Australia's National Cultural Policy. National Cultural Policy: *Revive, A place for every story, a story for every place* has been a landmark policy for Australia's arts and cultural sector and strongly aligns with the mission, purpose and work of Arts8 organisations.

The subsequent *Sustainability Review of the Arts8* and associated Commonwealth funding uplift represented a significant and much-needed investment in Australia's national arts training infrastructure. For the Arts8 organisations, this investment has provided a critical lifeline at a precarious time and has been vital in stabilising and enabling the ongoing viability of training organisations. This investment was desperately needed and has been enormously restorative, responding to decades of underinvestment, increasing operational and compliance pressures, workforce strain, and the ongoing impacts of the pandemic.

Revive has played an important role in stabilising Arts8 organisations, allowing many to move from operating in a continual state of constraint and vulnerability toward greater sustainability and longer-term planning. The investment has supported organisations to contribute to strengthening systems and infrastructure, rebuilding workforce capacity, improving student wellbeing and child safety measures, and maintaining the high-quality, practice-based training that underpins Australia's performing arts, screen and creative industries.

While *Revive* helped stabilise key national arts training organisations, there is increasing concern across Arts8 that the broader creative pipeline remains under significant pressure. Declining access to arts education in schools, shortages of specialist arts educators, increasing costs associated with arts training, weakened independent and small-to-medium sectors, and fragmentation between the Arts and Education portfolios are placing pressure on the future health of Australia's arts and cultural sector, and Australia's storytelling ability, critical to our national identity.

This challenge extends beyond Arts8 organisations and affects the broader Australian cultural sector, future workforce development, audience participation, and the long-term health of Australia's creative and cultural life.

Arts8 therefore believes the next phase of national cultural policy must move beyond stabilisation toward long-term cultural sustainability, growth and coordination. This requires a more connected national approach to arts learning, participation, training and workforce development, recognising arts education and training as essential cultural infrastructure underpinning all five pillars of *Revive*.

From *Revive* to *Thrive*: Priorities for the Next National Cultural Policy

Revive has significantly stabilised Australia's arts and cultural sector after years of financial strain, workforce shortages and chronic underinvestment. Across the Arts8, the policy has markedly improved organisational sustainability.

The next phase of national cultural policy must focus on enabling the Arts8 organisations and the entire Australian arts and cultural sector to thrive. The future strength of Australia's cultural ecology depends not only on sustaining national arts organisations, but on rebuilding the broader pipeline of arts learning, training, workforce development and early career opportunities that underpin the sector.

Arts8 believes the next version of the National Cultural Policy is an opportunity to strengthen national coordination, embed arts education and training more centrally within cultural policy, and support a more connected, equitable and sustainable cultural ecology across Australia.

Priorities for the Next National Cultural Policy

1. Arts Education and Training

Arts8 believes arts education (primary and secondary schools), training and youth engagement must become a stronger national priority within the next phase of cultural policy. Arts organisations are increasingly concerned about declining arts participation in schools, shortages of specialist arts educators, weakened pathways into tertiary training, and the growing fragmentation between education and cultural policy (see, for example, [Gattenhof & Saunders, 2026](#)).

Arts education and training underpin the long-term sustainability of Australia's creative and cultural ecology and workforce capability. Whether through a dedicated sixth pillar or stronger integration across the existing pillars, the next NCP should recognise arts education and training as essential cultural infrastructure connected to schools, tertiary education, industry and lifelong participation.

2. Sustaining the Arts and Cultural Ecology

Arts8 believes the next NCP must place greater emphasis on sustaining the broader arts and cultural ecology, particularly the independent and small-to-medium sectors that support early career artists, experimentation and new Australian work.

While *Revive* successfully strengthened key national organisations, many parts of the broader ecology remain fragile. Independent theatre companies, festivals, fringe sectors, short-form and local screen production and small creative organisations provide critical pathways for graduates and emerging artists to continue developing practice, building networks and creating new work, and providing stepping stones to the profession by 'on the job' skills development. Across Arts8, there is growing concern that declining opportunities within these sectors are weakening long-term artistic development, workforce sustainability and cultural innovation across Australia.

3. Incentivising philanthropic support

Arts8 supports calls from across the broader arts sector for enhanced tax incentives for philanthropic giving to arts and arts training organisations, including proposals such as enhanced tax deductibility measures for donations to arts and cultural organisations. Such measures could play an important role in supporting critical aspects of Australia's arts and cultural ecology, including training and education, early career artists, new work development, professional development opportunities, and small-to-medium and independent arts companies. Relatively modest investments can make a significant difference in these areas.

However, capacity for philanthropic fundraising is uneven across the sector. For example, while some Arts8 organisations have dedicated private giving teams to support and facilitate philanthropy, others do not have the same level of resourcing or infrastructure. All Arts8 organisations would benefit from increased philanthropic support and the resources to achieve their strategic ambitions. Philanthropy is important for all Arts8 organisations; for some, this support is a critical necessity that enables core learning activities, for others, philanthropy contributes to capital infrastructure or student support programs.

4. Strengthening training and pathways

The Job-Ready Graduates scheme, which substantially increased student contributions for Creative Arts, Arts and Humanities degrees, is having a significant negative impact on Australia's broader arts and cultural ecology. Beyond the financial burden placed on students, the policy sends a damaging message to young people that there are limited employment opportunities or viable careers within the arts and cultural industries. This is both misleading and at odds with current workforce needs. At the same time that participation in arts training is becoming more expensive, sectors across the industry are reporting critical workforce shortages, particularly in technical, production and

backstage roles. [Creative Australia and Service and Creative Skills Australia's](#) (SaCSA) recent report suggests that these shortages are becoming increasingly acute.

There is also a need for greater national coordination of training and workforce pathways across the arts and cultural sector. This includes stronger alignment between secondary education, VET, tertiary education and industry, and greater support for students to participate in practice-based specialist training of VET providers such as NAISDA, NIDA, NICA and Australian Ballet School. While workforce and skills shortages are increasingly being identified at state and territory levels, these challenges are not isolated to individual jurisdictions. Many of the workforce pressures currently facing the sector are national in nature and require coordinated, long-term national planning rather than fragmented state-based responses. Arts8 believes there is a need for more coherent national leadership and collaboration across governments, training providers and industry to ensure workforce development is responsive, sustainable and aligned across Australia.

Exploring models that better integrate VET pathways into national training institutions may help strengthen workforce development and improve access into the sector. Arts8 supports consideration of a coordinated National Training Framework, developed collaboratively between government, industry and training providers, which establishes clear standards, accountabilities and workforce outcomes for publicly supported training initiatives.

Arts8 also encourages consideration of 'apprentice' models for technical and production roles within the arts and cultural industries. This could be based on NIDA's existing model, where the majority of students are embedded in industry workplaces as part of their studies, leading to excellent employment outcomes. Such models could extend and complement the study programs already offered by training institutions, enabling graduates to transition more effectively into the workforce while continuing to develop industry-specific skills and experience. As workforce shortages intensify across areas such as staging, lighting, sound, costume, construction and live production, there is a growing need for structured, paid pathways that combine formal training, industry placement, mentorship and ongoing professional learning. These approaches may help strengthen workforce sustainability, diversify entry pathways into the sector and support longer-term career development across the arts and cultural industries.

Existing partnership models demonstrate the potential of this approach. For example, the [Crew Development Program](#) in New South Wales, delivered through a partnership between Screen NSW, TAFE NSW, Australian Film Television and Radio School and National Institute of Dramatic Art and funded by Create NSW, provided targeted training for learners from under-represented groups in critical entry-level and mid-career screen industry roles. Importantly, the program combined intensive skills training with paid internships and long-term mentorship, creating more sustainable pathways into employment and industry participation.

NAISDA is also addressing this from a First Nations perspective with the introduction of the Certificate IV in Live Production and Technical Services course in 2027.

ANAM's partnerships with professional orchestras and performance ensembles respond to the needs of the sector, embedding musicians (as part of their ANAM training) in the professional performance environment, providing the connections, mentoring and pipeline talent needed by the professional music performance companies across Australia.

Impact of Revive and Arts8 Funding Uplift

The *Sustainability Review of the Arts8* and associated Commonwealth funding uplift through *Revive* represented a significant investment in Australia's national arts training infrastructure. Across the Arts8, the uplift supported organisational stabilisation following a prolonged period of financial pressure, workforce strain, increasing operational complexity and decades of underinvestment.

While the impact varied across organisations and artforms, the funding has largely been restorative rather than expansionary. For some organisations, the uplift allowed them to move from operating in a continual state of constraint and vulnerability toward greater sustainability, stability and long-term planning. The investment has enabled Arts8 organisations to improve operational capacity, maintain high-quality training standards, and continue delivering critical cultural, educational and industry outcomes for Australia.

Organisational Stability

The funding uplift enabled Arts8 organisations to move beyond short-term operational survival toward greater stability and longer-term strategic planning. For some Arts8 organisations, the investment helped address longstanding structural deficits, build operational capacity, and support longer-term organisational sustainability.

Importantly, the uplift has enabled organisations to focus not simply on survival, but on maintaining the quality, ambition and integrity of their work, while continuing to support students, artists and communities nationally.

Facilities and Physical Infrastructure

For some, facilities and physical infrastructure upgrades were also a significant outcome of the *Revive* funding uplift, with several Arts8 organisations able to invest in learning environments, student wellbeing, creative precincts and long-term organisational capacity. Collectively, these developments reflect the important role that arts training institutions play not only as education providers, but as national cultural infrastructure.

The funding uplift for the Flying Fruit Fly Circus provided the confidence and stability to establish Circus Centre Melbourne, taking over and activating the former Circus Oz site at 50 Perry Street in Melbourne. The new centre has enabled FFFC to expand its presence in Melbourne while also creating a major new hub for professional circus artists to train, create work and connect. Since opening in October 2025, Circus Centre Melbourne has rapidly emerged as an important creative precinct, hosting a range of arts companies and independent artists. Beyond supporting FFFC's own training programs, the centre is now contributing more broadly to Australia's contemporary circus and performing arts ecology.

Similarly, the Australian Ballet School was able to undertake significant refurbishment works across its facilities, including upgrades to studios, classrooms, student amenities and office spaces. These improvements have strengthened the quality of the learning environment, ensured facilities better reflect contemporary professional standards, and enhanced child safety and wellbeing measures for students.

At the Australian National Academy of Music, the funding uplift supported organisational capacity and governance required to progress the South Melbourne Town Hall refurbishment project, including reinstating a Chief Operating Officer position to assist in managing the \$110 million redevelopment. This reflects how the funding uplift has enabled organisations not only to stabilise operations, but also to undertake major long-term infrastructure projects, and in ANAM's case, to build the infrastructure to expand organisational income streams to support future generations of artists and audiences.

For NAISDA, investment focused strongly on culturally safe and holistic student support and infrastructure. This included the establishment of a new Wellness Centre, alongside improvements to accommodation, catering and campus facilities. These developments are particularly important in supporting student success and reducing barriers to tertiary education for First Nations learners, recognising that participation and retention are closely connected to wellbeing, cultural safety and access to appropriate support structures.

For the Australian Youth Orchestra, the *Revive* uplift has supported national and international touring, partnerships and training delivery across Australia. These activities function as a form of cultural infrastructure, connecting regional and metropolitan communities, supporting workforce development and maintaining Australia's international cultural presence.

At NICA, the *Revive* uplift enabled further investment in equipment, technology and the reconfiguration of training and performance spaces to maximise access for artists, companies and the broader community alongside its core training programs. Beyond supporting enrolled students, NICA plays an important role within Australia's contemporary circus ecology by providing alumni and emerging artists with access to training spaces, trainers and professional development opportunities. NICA's internship program supports independent artists and small companies through the development and presentation of new work, while also creating critical networking, marketing and audience development opportunities. The uplift also enabled NICA to establish the Australian Circus Summit, a biennial national and international gathering focused on industry development, collaboration and the shared contemporary practice across the circus and physical theatre sectors.

For NIDA, the *Revive* uplift enabled NIDA to literally survive and to address urgent structural repairs to its buildings.

Workforce Capacity and Operational Infrastructure

A significant proportion of the uplift was directed toward restoring workforce sustainability and strengthening core organisational infrastructure. This included benchmarking salaries to improve retention and competitiveness nationally and internationally, rebuilding depleted teams following the pandemic, and investing in essential systems such as IT infrastructure, digital platforms, child-safe facilities, wellbeing services and operational capability.

While these investments are often invisible to the public, they are fundamental to maintaining safe, contemporary and high-quality arts training environments. Across the Arts8, organisations consistently identified the importance of attracting and retaining highly skilled artists, educators, technicians and operational staff required to sustain high-quality arts training. For example, NICA used the *Revive* uplift to recruit international leadership expertise, strengthen workforce capability across the circus sector and expand professional development and technical training opportunities for graduates, trainers and industry practitioners nationally.

This has been especially important in identified First Nations roles, where recruitment and retention are increasingly challenging, but remain essential to advancing the first pillar of *Revive* through First Nations self-determination, cultural authority and leadership development.

The uplift has also contributed to supporting organisations' bandwidth to support education governance, new legislation requirements, and compliance.

Program Development

For some Arts8 organisations, the *Revive* investment also enabled significant program, curriculum and educational development that extended beyond organisational sustainability. A strong example is the Australian Film Television and Radio School's *On Country Pathways Program* (OCP), which delivered First Nations-led screen and audio training in partnership with communities across Australia. The program supported more than 90 First Nations creatives from over 50 Nations through tailored training grounded in place, culture and community, while also strengthening pathways into further training and employment through mentorship, scholarships, and industry-connected pathways.

Broadly, the funding uplift supported curriculum renewal and stronger industry-aligned training pathways across the Arts8 organisations. This included the development and refinement of curriculum offerings and increased responsiveness to emerging sector challenges such as AI, remote learning and changing workforce demands. *Revive*, in tandem with philanthropic support, enabled

NIDA to embed *Wijara*, a unique course adopting a First Nations pedagogical framework, into its core curriculum. Similarly, NAISDA has undertaken research, consultation and planning for a new Certificate IV in Live Production and Technical Services, scheduled to commence in 2027. This represents the first major expansion of NAISDA's curriculum and responds directly to the shortage of First Nations practitioners in production and technical roles across the arts and cultural sector. NICA has also expanded and diversified its training pathways in response to industry demand and workforce shortages, introducing new Circus Coach and Show Technician support streams within its Certificate IV in Circus Arts, alongside its existing Speciality Artist stream. In addition, the Bachelor of Circus program now includes a Work Integrated Learning (WIL) unit, providing students with industry-immersive experiences designed to strengthen graduate employment outcomes and industry readiness.

Collectively, these initiatives demonstrate that the *Revive* uplift was not simply about sustaining existing activity. It enabled Arts8 organisations to strengthen training models, expand participation and better align arts education and training with the future needs of Australia's creative and cultural industries.

Quality of Teaching, Learning and Training

The funding uplift has also strengthened the quality and sustainability of teaching, learning and industry training across the Arts8 organisations. Arts8 institutions deliver highly specialised, practice-based training that relies on intensive face-to-face teaching, industry-standard facilities, contemporary technical infrastructure, and ongoing engagement with professional artists and industry practitioners. These models of training are fundamentally different to standard higher education delivery.

The uplift has enabled organisations to attract and retain leading artists, educators, technicians and operational staff, improve student support and wellbeing services, modernising learning environments, and maintain curriculum that continues to evolve alongside rapidly changing industries and technologies. This has been particularly important in areas such as screen production, contemporary circus, technical production and performing arts training, where industry expectations, technologies and modes of production continue to shift quickly.

Across Arts8, organisations consistently identified the importance of maintaining high-quality teaching and learning environments that are safe, contemporary, inclusive and connected to industry practice. The investment has helped organisations maintain internationally recognised standards of training while continuing to support culturally safe and industry-engaged learning experiences for students from across Australia. Curriculum redevelopment across organisations has also been essential in responding to evolving industry expectations nationally and internationally.

At the Australian National Academy of Music, the uplift ensured teaching faculty pay levels are nationally competitive, ensuring the highest pedagogical standards are met.

Five Pillars of Revive

The outcomes of *Revive* across the Arts8 demonstrate the impact of sustained investment in national arts training infrastructure. Across the Arts8, organisations are strengthening First Nations leadership, broadening access and participation, placing artists and creative workers at the centre of training and policy, investing in long-term cultural infrastructure, and building deeper connections between artists, audiences and communities.

Programs and initiatives such as *On Country Pathways*, NIDA's *Wijara* First Nations Curriculum, Circus Centre Melbourne, national training partnerships, live production course for First Nations students, curriculum renewal and major campus investments demonstrate how targeted investment and long-term policy settings can strengthen participation, workforce development, cultural leadership and national creative capacity.

Pillar 1: First Nations First

First Nations First is central to the work of Arts8 organisations and is reflected through significant investment in culturally grounded learning, including its unique, specifically designed courses, partnerships and leadership.

NAISDA positions this work at the core of its purpose through embedded Indigenous knowings in the curriculum, Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property protocols, a new Wellness Centre, and the development of a Live Production Certificate designed to grow First Nations technical and production pathways. Critical to its long-term vision, positioning NAISDA not simply as a training provider, but an internationally recognised centre of excellence with responsibility across First Nations training, wellness, workforce development, cultural authority and sector leadership.

Australian Film Television and Radio School's *On Country Pathways* program similarly demonstrates the importance of embedding First Nations leadership and perspectives within training and industry development, creating scholarships, mentoring and pathways for First Nations creatives in regional and remote communities. Across Arts8, organisations continue to strengthen partnerships with First Nations artists, communities and cultural leaders through commissioning, curriculum development, mentorship and culturally safe learning environments.

The National Institute of Dramatic Art is embedding First Nations leadership as a whole-of-organisation approach, including the development of core curriculum and pathways into the creative industries. *Winjara*, a new mandatory subject, has been developed and delivered using a First Nations pedagogical framework. All NIDA first-year Bachelor students learn foundational skills through a markedly non-Western holistic educational model. Students not only gain practical skills but also cultivate a deeper understanding of community and collaborative storytelling and *Connection to Country*, an inclusive practice rooted in Australian Indigenous culture. Recently, NIDA piloted its First Nations Pathways initiative through a combination of its staffing resources and a one-off anonymous donation. Already, NIDA Pathways is providing a transformational program to support both behind-the-scenes and performer creatives to realise career opportunities in the dramatic arts. Bringing together participants from regional and remote communities to Sydney for a deep immersion workshop, participants are already applying for creative education programs around the country.

Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story

Across Arts8, this pillar is strongly connected to access, participation and the broadening of storytelling across communities, regions and artforms. Australian Film Television and Radio School continues to expand flexible and remote delivery, regional outreach and scholarship programs to ensure screen and audio education reaches learners from regional, remote and under-represented communities.

The National Institute of Dramatic Art has made structural changes to NIDA across the board, from recruitment practices, curriculum, wellbeing support and the establishment of First Nations and Equity and Inclusion teams to increasing scholarship programs, all in support of increasing access to creative individuals who are representative of the nation. Additionally, NIDA annually attracts over 98,000 participants across a range of engagement and storytelling activities; performances, productions and courses, to encourage participation.

The Australian National Academy of Music, NAISDA and National Institute of Circus Arts similarly connect this pillar to expanding participation, audience engagement and cultural exchange through community programs, international partnerships and culturally grounded creative practice. At the National Institute of Circus Arts, storytelling is positioned as central to contemporary circus practice, deepening audience accessibility and emotional connection. The Australian Youth Orchestra similarly

advances this pillar through national and international touring, partnerships and education programs that connect audiences and communities across Australia and globally.

Flying Fruit Fly Circus and Australian Ballet School likewise frame their work as nurturing future artists and audiences, strengthening community participation and ensuring young people from a range of backgrounds can engage meaningfully with arts and cultural learning. The Australian Ballet School nurtures national and international partnerships both to enable access to students interested in attending the School, and to support Australian Ballet School students to explore the world.

Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist

Across Arts8, there is a strong and consistent belief that artists, creative workers and learners must remain at the centre of training, funding and cultural policy. The Australian Youth Orchestra and the Australian National Academy of Music support artists as learners, workers and leaders, developing across long career pathways and contributing to cultural, community and professional life across a wide range of sectors, including leadership beyond the arts.

Our organisations deliver highly specialised, practice-based training that places artistic development, collaboration and professional experience at the centre of learning. This includes intensive studio practice, touring, workplace-embedded learning, mentorship, production opportunities and partnerships with leading artists and companies nationally and internationally.

The Australian National Academy of Music also invests in the artform by connecting musicians and composers to create new music that is performed and broadcast, and actively encourages cross-disciplinary collaborations. For NAISDA, culturally safe infrastructure is an embedded part of training delivery and critical to learning equity, reducing barriers to tertiary education for First Nations learners and strengthening pathways into the creative industries.

Collectively, there is also strong recognition from Arts8 that supporting artists extends beyond technical training. Fair pay, wellbeing support, safe learning environments, career sustainability and culturally safe practice are increasingly recognised as essential to supporting long-term creative careers and maintaining a healthy arts workforce.

Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Across Arts8, cultural infrastructure is understood as much more than buildings alone. It includes workforce capability, governance, digital systems, curriculum, partnerships, facilities and the long-term stability required to sustain national arts training and cultural participation.

Australian Film Television and Radio School, Australian Youth Orchestra and National Institute of Dramatic Art all highlight the importance of sustained investment in institutional capacity, contemporary systems, evolving curriculum, practice-based training models, and national delivery through touring, partnerships and other forms of sector connectivity that remain responsive to rapidly changing industries and technologies.

At the Australian National Academy of Music, NAISDA, The Australian Ballet School, and the National Institute of Dramatic Art, *Revive* has supported campus renewal, workforce rebuilding, governance strengthening and the modernisation of facilities and infrastructure.

The establishment of Circus Centre Melbourne by Flying Fruit Fly Circus demonstrates how infrastructure investment can directly support artist development, employment pathways, public participation, community access and broader sector vitality. The centre now operates as a significant creative hub supporting training, rehearsal, performance and First Nations artist development.

Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience

For Arts8, audience engagement is understood not simply as attendance or marketing, but as an important cultural responsibility connected to participation, access, education and cultural renewal.

Australian Youth Orchestra and Australian National Academy of Music demonstrate how public performance, touring and community engagement create meaningful entry points for audiences while maintaining high artistic standards. Performances by both organisations are regularly broadcast on national and state radio stations. This also highlights that youth and training activity is often positioned as secondary within presentation systems, despite strong audience engagement when presented with appropriate visibility.

The National Institute of Circus Arts similarly highlights the importance of storytelling within circus practice in building deeper audience connection and accessibility.

At NIDA, engagement with audiences is embedded into its core learning where students learn to engage, attract and interact with audiences. Additionally, NIDA is a central meeting point for audiences (including the general public, industry and schools) to meet and collectively experience a range of performances that capture the imagination.

Australian Film Television and Radio School, Flying Fruit Fly Circus, and NAISDA continue to build national and international audience pathways through touring, partnerships, broadcast opportunities and cultural exchange, ensuring Australian stories reach diverse audiences across multiple platforms and communities.

At the same time, the closure of the National Institute of Dramatic Art's Kindergarten to Year 6 program highlights the fragility of arts learning and engagement pathways for children and young people, and the challenges associated with sustaining high-quality arts participation programs outside formal schooling contexts. Across Arts8, there is growing concern that declining access to arts learning in both schools and community settings is weakening the long-term pipeline of artists, audiences and cultural participation in Australia.

Additionally, Arts8 recognises that First Nations arts, culture and engagement cannot be separated from broader social, cultural and economic outcomes. The next NCP should more equitably recognise the relationship between First Nations arts investment, cultural participation, community wellbeing and self-determination, and strengthen alignment with Closing the Gap and broader national social and economic policy priorities.

Emerging Challenges across Arts8

Arts8 form part of Australia's long-term cultural infrastructure, supporting the development of artists, creative practitioners, technicians and cultural leaders across extended career pathways. The impact of this work is not always immediate or measurable in the short term. Rather, Arts8 contributes to the long-term strength of Australia's cultural ecology through training, participation, artistic development and workforce capacity built over many years. Arts8 alumni are found in all major performing arts organisations across the country and in leading cultural roles. The national arts training organisations are the talent pipeline for the future.

While *Revive* has played a critical role in stabilising national arts training organisations, the next version of the NCP must focus more directly on rebuilding the broader pipeline into arts learning, training and professional practice. Without sustained investment in arts education, training and pathways, the long-term sustainability of Australia's cultural and creative sectors remains at risk.

Arts Education Pipeline Crisis

Arts8 organisations are increasingly concerned about the weakening pipeline into arts training and creative careers. Declining access to arts education in primary and secondary schools, increasing rates of out-of-field arts teaching, shortages of specialist arts educators, and reduced participation opportunities are having a direct impact on the future sustainability of the sector. Lack of arts access for young people impacts the diversity of future artists, especially since dance is not always an obvious choice for young males and without any introduction, they may never explore this option.

And as a result of not normalising this activity, boys in dance are often subjected to extreme bullying. Without sustained access to quality arts education in schools, the pipeline into arts training is diminished. The pool of students engaging in arts learning and considering creative careers becomes smaller, resulting in fewer artists, creative practitioners and arts workers entering the sector. The Australian Ballet School experiences students being attracted to training overseas, lured by scholarships and free training that European governments fund. Over time, this also has significant implications for future audiences, cultural participation and the long-term vitality of Australia's arts and cultural life. Arts education also contributes to broader social cohesion by fostering empathy, collaboration, intercultural understanding and shared cultural participation. Through engagement with diverse stories, perspectives and creative practices, arts learning helps young Australians develop a stronger sense of identity, belonging and connection to their communities.

In Australia, The Arts are one of eight learning areas within the Australian Curriculum and consist of five distinct but equal subjects: Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts. The Australian Curriculum outlines that all students are entitled to study The Arts throughout their schooling. However, this is not the reality in many Australian schools. In some jurisdictions, Media Arts is still not recognised or delivered as a standalone subject, limiting students' understanding of the industries, pathways and career opportunities that exist within the screen and media sectors. The Australian Curriculum also identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures as a Cross-Curriculum Priority across all learning areas. Arts education provides particularly meaningful opportunities for students to engage with First Nations histories, cultures, perspectives and contemporary creative practices through storytelling and performance.

Across Arts8, these pressures are being seen through declining participation in some artforms, reduced preparedness of students entering training pathways, and growing concern about the long-term health of Australia's artistic workforce and cultural life more broadly. An objective for The Australian Ballet School is to correct the shortage of male dancers in the industry. This is not simply an issue for Arts8 organisations, but for the broader Australian cultural ecology.

Arts8 believes there is an urgent need for stronger national coordination between the Arts and Education portfolios to ensure more connected pathways between schools, tertiary education, training and industry. At present, responsibility for arts learning, training and workforce development is fragmented across jurisdictions and portfolios, resulting in inconsistent access, uneven provision and weak alignment between education and cultural policy.

Arts8 considers the next NCP should place greater emphasis on arts education and training as a national priority. Whether through a dedicated sixth pillar or stronger integration across the existing pillars, arts learning and training must be recognised as foundational cultural infrastructure underpinning the future sustainability of Australia's arts and cultural sector.

Existing programs such as NIDA's VET III programs in *Live Production and Technical Services* and *Screen in Media* for NSW high school teachers from around the state wishing to host productions in their schools is an opportunity that could be expanded to support this ambition.

Cultural Ecology and Early Career Pathways

Arts8 organisations are increasingly concerned about the fragility of the broader arts and cultural ecology, particularly the decline of independent and small-to-medium performing arts and screen sectors that play a critical role in supporting graduates and early career artists, and developing Australian stories. While Arts8 organisations provide high-quality training and industry preparation, the sustainability of these pathways depends on the health of the wider ecology that graduates enter following training.

Independent companies, small-to-medium organisations, festivals, fringe sectors, short-form screen production and experimental creative practice have historically provided essential spaces for early

career artists to develop new work, build professional networks, take creative risks and continue refining their practice following graduation. Across the Arts8, there is growing concern that these opportunities are diminishing, particularly across the theatre and screen industries.

This is being felt through reduced opportunities for experimentation, fewer entry-level creative and technical roles, and declining pathways for graduates to build sustainable careers within professional practice. Small-scale productions, independent theatre, web-series, short films and festival work often act as critical training grounds for the next generation of Australian artists and creative workers, while also contributing significantly to innovation, storytelling and cultural diversity across the sector.

Arts8 is also concerned about the decline of broader industry development pathways that historically supported workforce growth and professional learning, including opportunities previously provided through public broadcasters and television production sectors.

Arts8 believes the next phase of national cultural policy must place greater emphasis on sustaining the full cultural ecology, including stronger support for independent artists, small-to-medium organisations, early career development and creative experimentation. Without investment in these interconnected parts of the sector, the long-term sustainability of Australia's creative workforce and cultural life will remain at risk.

First Nations and Inclusion

Across Arts8, there is strong recognition that access, participation and inclusion cannot be separated from broader issues of wellbeing, housing, cultural safety and economic equity. NAISDA particularly emphasises that First Nations arts training cannot operate as isolated vocational delivery, but must be connected to community, cultural practice, wellbeing and holistic student support, while also creating tangible career outcomes and pathways into the professional arts and cultural sector. This approach is evidenced through NAISDA's exceptional student completion outcomes, which are significantly higher than national averages and comparable to programs for First Nations learners. NAISDA also emphasises that many First Nations students are not entering training from the same starting point as other cohorts, due to systemic inequities in access to culturally responsive education, literacy and numeracy support, housing stability, transport, healthcare and other social determinants. In this context, holistic wellbeing, accommodation and cultural support cannot be understood as additional services attached to training delivery; they are essential foundations for participation, retention, achievement and long-term career development. As a vehicle for self-determination, the arts are critically important for First Nations peoples. First Nations arts training and cultural organisations play a vital role in supporting pathways where First Nations artists and creatives maintain cultural authority and leadership across the entire creative process.

NAISDA's contribution to the development of Australia's contemporary Indigenous dance and performing arts sector has been profound. Without organisations such as NAISDA, the strength and vibrancy of the contemporary First Nations performing arts sector in Australia would be much weaker. However, opportunities to further elevate First Nations artistic leadership and international cultural engagement, consistent with the aspirations of *Revive*, remain underdeveloped without sustained investment and enabling support structures.

Arts8 organisations are increasingly worried that rising living costs, housing unaffordability and higher education expenses—especially in major cities where many training centres are based, are impacting recruitment, retention and participation. These pressures disproportionately affect students from low-income, regional, remote and other under-represented backgrounds.

Across Arts8, there is concern that current policy and funding settings risk narrowing participation and weakening the diversity of Australia's future artistic workforce. Arts8 believes stronger alignment between cultural policy, education policy and broader social policy frameworks is required to support equitable participation and culturally safe pathways into the arts and creative industries.

Equity

Equity remains a significant challenge across the Arts8 organisations. Many Arts8 institutions provide accommodation, wellbeing and additional student support services that extend beyond the role traditionally associated with tertiary training providers. These supports are particularly important for students from regional, remote, low socioeconomic and under-represented backgrounds, many of whom relocate to undertake specialist arts training. For First Nations students, these challenges are often compounded by ongoing inequities in access to culturally safe education, housing, financial security and geographically accessible training pathways. Across Arts8, there is recognition that equitable participation for First Nations peoples requires not only financial support, but sustained investment in culturally responsive learning environments, community connection, mentorship and First Nations-led approaches to training and artistic development. At The Australian Ballet School, 1 in 3 students requires financial assistance in order to undertake full-time training at the School; securing this support, through bursaries, is a major focus in the School's Development Strategy.

While these models are resource-intensive, they play a critical role in supporting participation, retention and student success. Across Arts8, there is growing concern that rising living costs, housing pressures and increasing costs associated with higher education are creating additional barriers to participation in arts training and creative careers.

Generative AI and Emerging Technologies

Since the release of *Revive*, Arts8 organisations have been navigating the rapid emergence of generative artificial intelligence and evolving digital technologies across the creative industries. Across screen, performing arts and creative sectors, these technologies are reshaping production, authorship, workforce capability and creative practice.

Australian Film Television and Radio School, in particular, highlights the importance of ensuring policy and regulation continue to centre artists' rights, creative ownership and the integrity of artistic learning. Across Arts8, there is strong recognition that emerging technologies will continue to shape creative industries and training models; there is also concern that these changes must not diminish artistic labour, creative integrity or practice-based learning.

Arts8 believes future cultural policy must support the sector to engage critically and creatively with emerging technologies, while continuing to protect artists, creative workers and the cultural value of human creativity and storytelling.

Changing the perception of Careers in the Arts and Cultural Sector

Employment within the arts and cultural sector in Australia was frequently framed as a "lifestyle choice" under the previous Commonwealth Government. Policies such as the Job-Ready Graduates (JRG) scheme (2020) and changes to VET FEE-HELP scheme (2016), as well as a strong focus promoting Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines, sent clear messages to young people and their families discouraging them from pursuing arts training and creative careers after school, while incorrectly signalling that there were limited sustainable employment opportunities within the sector. The damage caused during this period continues to be felt across the industry. While *Revive* represented a significant and welcome shift in tone and direction, the damaging rhetoric of previous years still persists. This rhetoric must continue to be actively countered so that young people and their families understand that successful, sustainable and meaningful careers in the arts and cultural industries are not only possible, but essential to Australia's future. As a whole-of-government policy, the next National Cultural Policy should actively work to rebuild public confidence in the value of the sector and communicate the significant contribution arts and culture make to the nation. The arts and cultural sector employs more than

200,000 Australians, including around 50,000 practising artists (see [The Australia Institute, 2020](#)), and generates approximately \$67.4 billion in value added annually, representing 2.5% of Australia's GDP (see, for example, the [Cultural and Creative Activity](#) report published by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts).

Conclusion

Revive has been a landmark moment for Australia's arts and cultural sector. For Arts8 organisations, the NCP and associated funding uplift provided urgently needed critical survival funding and stability after years of financial pressure, workforce strain and underinvestment. It enabled organisations not only to survive, but some to begin rebuilding capacity, renewing infrastructure, strengthening training pathways and planning with greater confidence for the future.

At the same time, consultations across the Arts8 make clear that stabilising national training organisations alone will not secure the long-term future of Australia's cultural life. The broader ecology that sustains artists, audiences and creative industries remains under pressure.

Declining access to arts education, rising barriers to participation and training, workforce shortages, weakened early career pathways, and fragmentation across policy and funding settings continue to place strain on the sector.

***Revive* helped stabilise the sector. The next version of the national cultural policy must focus on how the sector can thrive. Arts8 believes this requires a more connected national approach to arts learning, participation, training and workforce development, recognising arts education and training as essential cultural infrastructure underpinning Australia's creative future.**

Australia's cultural future depends not only on supporting artists and organisations today, but on ensuring the next generation of artists, creative workers, audiences and communities are able to participate, train, create and thrive.