

Stage Queensland Submission – National Cultural Policy

Stage Queensland represents a diverse statewide network of performing arts venues, presenters and producers spanning metropolitan, regional and remote communities. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the renewal of Australia’s National Cultural Policy.

This submission reflects consultation with our members, Live Performance Australia and members of the national network of Performing Arts Presenter Associations (PAPA). It recognises that Queensland’s performing arts ecosystem is shaped by its scale, decentralisation, and reliance on strong connections between artists, venues and audiences. It highlights the need to strengthen this ecology from creation and touring through to presentation, workforce and infrastructure development, and audience engagement.

Our submission is centred on Four Priority Actions:

1. **Invest** in Workforce Development and Arts Education Pathways
2. **Strengthen** the Creation – Touring - Presentation Pipeline
3. **Enable** Audience Access Through Participation and Programming Support
4. **Establish** a National Performing Arts Infrastructure Fund

1. Invest in Workforce Development and Arts Education Pathways

Priority Action: Invest in workforce development and education pathways to support a sustainable, skilled and safe performing arts sector.

A safe and sustainable performing arts sector depends on the people who create, produce, present and support work. Queensland’s performing arts sector is facing growing workforce and education pipeline challenges, including declining participation in school arts subjects, reduced access to specialist teachers, limited pathways from education into industry, and contracting tertiary creative arts programs. These pressures are particularly acute in regional communities, affecting technical capability, producing capacity, workforce and community safety, and organisational resilience.

To build a sustainable arts workforce and audiences for the future, Stage Queensland supports industry calls for a coordinated national response to strengthen arts education and workforce pathways, including a National Inquiry into Arts Education and Training, reform to the federal Job-Ready Graduates scheme, improved workforce and participation data, and in Queensland, a review of ATAR scaling impacts.

Targeted investment in education, training, technical and production skills, venue-based expertise and leadership development is essential to build long-term sector capability, support audience development, and ensure the sector can continue delivering high-quality cultural experiences.

2. Strengthen the Creation - Touring - Presentation Pipeline

Priority Action: Align policy settings, funding programs and industry practice to support stronger integration between the creation, touring and presentation of Australian work.

Touring is essential to cultural access across regional Australia, yet current systems constrain the flow of touring productions. While audience demand remains strong, there is a growing shortage of suitable mid-scale touring productions, limiting programming confidence, audience engagement and long-term participation.

There is an opportunity to better connect the development of new work with viable touring and presentation outcomes. This includes aligning programs such as Playing Australia with contemporary touring models, supporting earlier engagement of presenters in the development of new work, improving coordination of funding timelines and investment mechanisms, and ensuring presenters' audience and market knowledge informs funding decisions. A more integrated approach will enable work to be developed with audiences, places and touring outcomes in mind—ensuring greater reach, relevance and sustainability.

Stage Queensland supports industry calls to reform national touring mechanisms and significantly increase investment in Playing Australia.

3. Enable Audience Access Through Participation and Programming Support

Priority Action: Establish a national framework that recognises and invests in presenters as essential cultural infrastructure that enables audience access, participation and cultural engagement.

Presenting organisations are the connective tissue between artists, work and audiences. Through programming, partnerships and community participation opportunities, they enable audiences to access and engage with arts and culture in meaningful and locally relevant ways.

However, presenters operate within increasingly constrained financial environments while balancing expectations of artistic ambition and community impact. Sustained investment—including mechanisms such as targeted programming support—will enable presenters to commission, co-present and program diverse work, grow audiences, and share risk across the sector.

Targeted programming support is particularly important in regional and outer metropolitan communities, where presenters often play a lead role in reducing barriers to participation and sustaining ongoing cultural engagement.

4. Establish a National Performing Arts Infrastructure Fund

Priority Action: Establish matched funding programs to support the renewal and modernisation of performing arts venues.

Many venues across Queensland are ageing and no longer fit for contemporary practice. This limits the type, scale and quality of work that can be presented, restricts touring opportunities, and reduces access to arts and cultural experiences for communities.

The challenge is particularly acute in regional areas, where outdated infrastructure can limit participation, creative development and the ability to attract touring productions requiring contemporary technical capability, accessibility and flexible staging.

Targeted infrastructure investment, including matched funding models, is needed to upgrade performance spaces, technical systems, accessibility, digital capability and audience facilities, while also supporting long-term sustainability and resilience.

Performing arts venues are essential cultural infrastructure that contribute to community life, local economies and regional vibrancy. Ensuring venues are modern, accessible and fit-for-purpose will strengthen touring networks, support artistic ambition and expand access to high-quality arts and cultural experiences across Queensland.

Conclusion

As Australia looks toward major national opportunities, including the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games, there is a timely imperative to strengthen the systems that underpin cultural participation. This moment should be leveraged to build long-term capacity, not short-term activity.

Across all priority areas, policy and investment settings should support First Nations self-determination and cultural leadership, while strengthening opportunities for culturally diverse artists, organisations and communities to create, participate in and experience the performing arts.

Collectively, these priority actions recognise that a sustainable and accessible performing arts sector depends on connected investment across workforce development, creation, touring, presentation and infrastructure—ensuring all Australians can participate in and experience high-quality arts and cultural activity, regardless of geography.