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Submission from the Master of Curating and Cultural Leadership program at UNSW School of Art & Design for the Revive National Cultural Policy review.

The Master of Curating and Cultural Leadership represents a range of professional skills and roles in the arts ecology. Recognising the special place for curators and cultural producers in supporting all sectors of the arts, as a program we welcome the opportunity to highlight current needs and vulnerabilities and to make recommendations that contribute to addressing these through the National Cultural Policy, Revive. While the Program counts numerous significant arts and cultural leaders among its alumni, renowned locally and internationally, it recognises the vital importance of supporting small to medium, local and regional organisations and initiatives, which are the foundation for Australian arts and cultural practitioners—and often the most accessible cultural spaces.

Key needs & vulnerabilities

- **Recognition:** smaller spaces have incubated cultural practitioners of national and international significance and also serve as vital venues for emerging cultural workers, including artists and professionals. Despite this, they are often under-acknowledged in policy and seen as expendable.
- **Sustainability:** rapid shifts in funding compound uncertainty and hinder longer-term impact, limiting creative pathways and the fostering of new audiences.
- **Security:** cultural practitioner livelihoods, but also cultural sovereignty, are especially vulnerable to creative and legal threats posed by AI.
- **Accessibility:** cultural venues and events need resourcing to remain accessible and become more so (including digitally).
- **Innovation for all:** Equity and social justice are seldom framed as innovations—we have too few First Nations and CALD leadership opportunities in arts and culture.
- **Consultation:** there are too few opportunities for policy to be in ongoing conversation with stakeholders to foster collaborative adaptation to these needs and vulnerabilities—the processing of recommendations by AI, though ostensibly ‘efficient’, frankly reinforces this sense of disconnect between policymakers and communities they aim to support.

Our recommendations:

Informed by running one of the longest standing tertiary programs for training in curatorial and cultural leadership we recommend a commitment to Australia's creative education and a radical rethink of institutional leadership in the new national cultural policy, including:

- Expand Indigenous leadership opportunities and places for First Nation's students in creative education
- Whole of government approaches to cultural policy including education and health
- Repeal the Job-ready Graduates package

- Protect Australian creatives from AI through new, stronger copyright laws, transparent AI regulation and fair remuneration frameworks for creative labour
- Stop the partisan approach to art forms and bolster cross-art form approaches
- Provide more opportunities for diverse leadership of cultural institutions including but not limited to CALD people, Indigenous, women, people living with disability, younger people, possibly by including more dedicated places on boards.

About us

The Master of Curating and Cultural Leadership at the University of New South Wales (UNSW), Sydney, is a postgraduate program designed to develop future leaders for Australia's cultural and creative sectors through an integrated focus on curatorial practice, cultural policy, public engagement and institutional leadership. Delivered through the UNSW School of Art & Design at the university's Paddington campus, the degree combines critical and theoretical training with industry-based learning and professional practice. The program positions curating not only as exhibition-making, but as a broader form of cultural leadership connected to questions of social participation, ethics, heritage, public programming and cultural policy. Students engage with contemporary curatorial theory alongside practical experiences in exhibition development, audience engagement, arts management, writing and publishing, and museum and gallery practice. Launched in 1989 as the Master of Art Administration, the evolving curriculum of the Master of Curating and Cultural Leadership (since 2014) emphasises interdisciplinary and globally connected approaches to cultural production, including engagement with First Nations art and cultural histories, Asia-Pacific visual cultures and international biennales. Graduates are prepared for leadership roles across museums, galleries, festivals, public arts organisations and cultural policy environments, with career pathways spanning curatorship, cultural strategy, public programming, arts administration and creative sector advocacy.

We currently have 9 FTE Staff and approximately 431 students. Our cohort is diverse, with a large percentage coming from international students, demonstrating the global significance of training in Curating and Cultural Leadership.

Contemporary cultural leadership increasingly emerges through collaborative, grassroots and participatory practices rather than solely through established institutional authority.

The program represents an example of how tertiary education can support sector capability-building by integrating creative practice, leadership development, policy literacy and industry collaboration within a single postgraduate framework.

Response to the Pillars

The review of Revive presents an opportunity to strengthen Australia's cultural infrastructure by recognising cultural leadership, curatorial practice and arts education as central components of a sustainable national cultural ecology. Our program's emphasis on collaborative leadership, interdisciplinary practice and socially engaged cultural work suggests a number of priority areas for policy development:

1. First Nations First:

- Prioritise establishing principles for Indigenous Data Governance in the arts: Indigenous artistic activity is distinctive and should be visible on a global stage; if we do not record and preserve this activity with integrity it will be lost.
- Expand support for Indigenous curators, producers and cultural workers within galleries, museums, libraries, festivals and universities.

- Foster partnerships between tertiary institutions and First Nations communities to support culturally informed research, teaching and exhibition practice.
- Fund infrastructure to enable sustained First Nations governance and decision-making authority across cultural institutions.

2. A Place for Every Story:

- Increase support for culturally diverse, disability-led, regional and LGBTQIA+ arts organisations and curatorial initiatives.
- Invest in independent and artist-run spaces that provide pathways for experimental and underrepresented voices.
- Fund community-engaged curatorial projects that foreground local histories, lived experience and public participation.
- Recognise curatorial and public programming work as essential infrastructure to enable cultural access and representation.

3. Centrality of the Artist:

- Repeal the Job-ready Graduates Package, which makes creative and humanities education too expensive, undermining access to cultural and creative training.
- Support early-career curators, producers and arts workers alongside artists as essential contributors and facilitators of cultural production.
- Expand paid internships, residencies and mentorships connecting universities, cultural institutions and independent organisations.
- Increase investment in small-to-medium arts organisations as key sites for experimentation, professional development and artistic risk-taking.
- Recognise curatorial labour, cultural research and arts administration as integral to sustaining artistic ecosystems.
- Track career pathways for people in the creative and cultural sectors, noting the prevalence of portfolio careers.
- Protect Australian creatives from exploitative uses of artificial intelligence through stronger copyright protections, transparent AI regulation and fair remuneration frameworks for creative labour.

4. Strong Cultural Infrastructure:

- Incentivise institutions to work collaboratively, because connected and collaborative Institutions build more efficient infrastructure.
- Recognise tertiary arts education and practice-led research as core components of national cultural infrastructure.
- Ensure longer-term funding for public museums, galleries, artist-run initiatives and community cultural organisations that support curatorial innovation and public participation.

- Invest in digital cultural infrastructure, archives and collections to ensure sustainable access to Australia's cultural histories (such as the [Design & Art Australia Online \(DAAO\)](#)).
- Support curatorial research, publishing and commissioning programs that strengthen cultural interpretation and knowledge production.
- Encourage whole-of-government approaches to cultural policy that integrate arts and culture across education, health, social services and community development portfolios.
- Support cross-art form and interdisciplinary creative practice, rather than narrow, siloed or partisan approaches to cultural funding and policy.

5. Engaging the Audience:

- Increase support for participatory and community-led arts programming, including policies that actively encourage institutional collaboration and co-design with communities.
- Invest in public engagement initiatives that familiarise broader audiences with contemporary art, cultural debate and local histories.
- Support interdisciplinary and cross-sector collaborations that expand cultural participation beyond traditional arts audiences.
- Funding for experimental curatorial and digital engagement models that respond to changing audience behaviours and technologies.

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