



Drama South Australia

22 May 2026

### **Arts Education: The Missing Pillar in Australia's Cultural Future**

To Whom It May Concern,

The Board and members of Drama South Australia gladly welcome the Australian Government's commitment to developing a second consecutive National Cultural Policy and the opportunity to contribute to this important consultation.

As DALO (Drama Australia Liaison Officer) for Drama South Australia, I speak simultaneously from the perspective of the education sector and professional arts sector, and on a daily basis, I enjoy the wonderfully complementary relationship between them.

As an association, Drama SA represents all those working within the dramatic arts in South Australia.

The five pillars established through Revive have provided an important framework for recognising the value of culture in Australian life. They acknowledge the significance of First Nations storytelling, artistic practice, cultural infrastructure, inclusion and audience engagement. Yet as Australia looks toward the next chapter of cultural policy, there remains a significant omission: the absence of arts education as a clearly defined national priority.

Arts education is not simply one component of the cultural sector. It is the very foundation upon which Australia's modern cultural future is built. Every artist, performer, playwright, designer, technician, director, educator and informed audience member begins their cultural journey through opportunities to learn, create and participate. It is imperative to acknowledge that if Australia wishes to strengthen its creative industries, expand cultural participation and cultivate future cultural leaders, arts education must be recognised as essential infrastructure in that endeavour.

The consultation paper rightly identifies cultural knowledge as a driver of innovation, prosperity, wellbeing and social connection. It highlights the importance of creativity, future skills and community resilience. However, these outcomes do not emerge in isolation. They are developed through sustained engagement with quality arts experiences throughout childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Arts education fosters empathy, ethical understanding, intercultural awareness and civic engagement. These are not peripheral outcomes. They are essential attributes of an informed, inclusive and democratic society, and they are increasingly important in a world shaped by rapid technological change, artificial intelligence and growing social complexity which our young people are expected to navigate without a map.

There is also an urgent need to address equity of access. While some young people encounter rich cultural experiences through family and community networks, many rely on schools as their primary point of engagement with the arts. Access to high-quality arts education should not depend upon postcode, family income or circumstance. Schools, supported by skilled arts educators and strong partnerships with cultural organisations, play a vital role in ensuring every young Australian can participate meaningfully in cultural life.

This issue is becoming increasingly pressing. Across Australia, arts education faces significant challenges, including underinvestment, declining participation, reduced pathways into tertiary arts study and growing pressures on specialist arts programs. These trends raise important questions about how Australia intends to sustain a vibrant cultural sector while the educational foundations that nurture future artists, arts workers and audiences continue to erode.

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For these reasons, the next National Cultural Policy should explicitly recognise arts education as a cornerstone of Australia's cultural development through the urgent establishment of a sixth pillar: Arts Education and Creative Learning.

Such a pillar would acknowledge the fundamental role of arts education across primary, secondary and tertiary sectors; strengthen partnerships between education providers and cultural organisations; support the development and retention of specialist arts educators; and promote equitable access to meaningful artistic experiences for all Australians. Most importantly, it would recognise that cultural participation begins not at the point of consumption, but *at the point of learning*.

A nation's culture does not emerge by accident. It is explicitly learned, carefully practised, openly shared and determinedly sustained.

If the next National Cultural Policy seeks to shape Australia's cultural legacy for future generations, arts education must move from the margins of the discussion to the centre of the national conversation.

A dedicated Arts Education and Creative Learning pillar would recognise a simple but profound truth:

**Australia's cultural future begins in its classrooms.**

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Drama SA