

The Australian Ballet

Submission to Australia's National Cultural Policy

24 May 2026

Our Position: Dance is in the National Interest

Dance reminds us of what it means to be human: to move together, to witness effort and vulnerability, to carry knowledge through the body, and to connect across difference without words. These qualities are not incidental to national life; they are foundational to wellbeing, social cohesion and cultural continuity. A cultural policy that recognises this does more than support an artform. It affirms the value of human expression, care and connection as central to Australia's shared future.

The Australian Ballet carries a distinctive responsibility: to pursue artistic excellence at scale while contributing actively to the conditions that allow diverse forms of dance practice to flourish. We make this submission from our position as Australia's national ballet company, in service of the broader dance and live performance sector, including our close partnership with Orchestra Victoria, and in alignment with the policy priorities advanced by Live Performance Australia.

This submission also responds to a gap in Australia's 2023 National Cultural Policy. While *Revive* acknowledged dance as a vital form of cultural expression, it was largely framed at the level of principle rather than through dedicated mechanisms. Unlike music and literature, dance was not supported by a specific policy engine within Creative Australia. Dance, and ballet in particular, operates at the intersection of many government priorities, including social cohesion, health and wellbeing, education and youth development, regional vitality, and cultural diplomacy. It is a highly participatory artform, embedded in communities across Australia through professional performance, education, and lifelong practice. With the right policy settings, dance is well positioned to contribute even more fully to national outcomes that extend well beyond the arts portfolio.

We understand the future of The Australian Ballet to be deeply connected to the vitality of the wider dance ecology—encompassing independent artists, small-to-medium organisations, educators, presenters, and communities across the country. While *Revive* established an important whole-of-government framework for arts and culture, dance was comparatively under-represented within its structures and initiatives—often subsumed within broader performing arts categories rather than recognised as a generator of skilled work, a foundation for education and wellbeing, and a powerful contributor to social cohesion, civic resilience and diplomacy. The recommendations that follow translate this national-interest case into practical policy settings that would allow dance to realise its full public benefit for Australia.

Summary of Proposed Recommendations

Pillar 1 - First Nations First

1. Sector-wide First Nations commissioning, touring and workforce development

Pillar 2 – A Place for Every Story

2. Enable the full life-cycle of works of scale

Pillar 3 – Centrality of the Artist (*and Arts Worker*)

3. Nation-wide industry-led skills and training initiatives for artists and arts workers

Pillar 4 – Strong Cultural Infrastructure

4. Comprehensive mapping of the dance sector in Australia
5. Live Performance Production Incentive
6. 1.5x tax deductibility of donations
7. GST reform for tickets
8. Extension of Public Benevolent Institution (PBI) status
9. Expand international touring as cultural diplomacy and national capability

Pillar 5 – Engaging the Audience

10. National plan for arts and music education
11. Commission a national ‘Social Prescribing for Arts’ framework
12. ‘See It Live’ Cultural Pass
13. Strengthen domestic touring for social connection and participation

Delivering these recommendations will require increased and sustained Commonwealth investment in dance and live performance, alongside reform to existing policy and tax settings.

While regulatory and structural changes can significantly improve efficiency, resilience and leverage, they cannot substitute for adequate public funding at a time when costs have risen sharply and risk has become more concentrated. Investment should also be indexed to reflect inflation and the real cost drivers of live performance, including wages, freight, production inputs and touring costs, so that funding value does not erode over time. If dance is to fully realise its contribution to national wellbeing, social cohesion, education, workforce development and cultural diplomacy government investment must be commensurate with the scale, reach and public value expected of the sector. Targeted increases in public funding would enable these recommendations to operate as intended: unlocking long-term sustainability, supporting ambition at scale, and maximising the return on public investment for communities across Australia.

Pillar 1 – First Nations First

Recommendation 1: Sector-wide First Nations commissioning, touring and workforce development

The Australian Ballet supports a sector-wide, First Nations-led approach to commissioning, touring and workforce development in dance and live performance. In dance, and particularly in ballet, culturally safe pathways require not only access to opportunity but flexibility in how training, repertoire and progression are structured - recognising that classical norms have not historically been neutral or inclusive. Research by Patternmakers shows that while approximately 2% of students in private dance schools identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, this drops to around 1% at pre-professional and professional levels, indicating systemic attrition across the pipeline.

Lasting change requires policy settings that prioritise First Nations decision-making, long-term capability building, and culturally safe pathways for creation, presentation and market development. Coordinated approaches across portfolios, rather than one-off project funding would enable First Nations dance to be created and shared at scale nationally and internationally while supporting workforce pathways and intergenerational knowledge transfer.

Flora, a major collaboration between The Australian Ballet and Bangarra Dance Theatre, demonstrates both strong audience appetite for First Nations dance and the sector's capacity to realise ambitious, culturally grounded work at scale. However, its success was achieved without coordinated, sector-wide policy settings for First Nations commissioning, touring and workforce development, relying instead on institutional investment and ad hoc funding. A nationally aligned approach would enable works of this kind to be developed, shared and sustained more consistently.

Pillar 2 – A Place for Every Story

Recommendation 2: Enable the full life-cycle of works of scale

In ballet, artistic, technical and economic value accrue over time: works deepen through revival, artists mature through repetition, and public return increases as productions tour, restage and evolve rather than conclude at premiere. Works of scale hold particular public value precisely because of their longevity and reach. When fully supported, they create shared cultural moments that bring large and diverse audiences together, reinforcing the power of collective experience at a time of increasing social fragmentation.

Works of scale such as *Flora* generate sustained employment for artists and arts workers, support skills transmission across generations, and act as powerful vehicles for cultural diplomacy - projecting Australian creativity, values and stories onto the world stage. These benefits accrue over time and require funding structures that recognise scale as a long-term public asset, not a one-off project.

The Australian Ballet welcomes the ambition of the Creative Futures Fund, established under *Revive* to support the creation and sharing of Australian stories and to encourage cross-sector partnerships. However, experience from the Fund's first investment round highlights a structural limitation common to many contemporary funding models: the difficulty of supporting work across all stages of development and presentation.

The Creative Futures Fund's tightly defined criteria have meant that relatively few large, producing institutions—such as The Australian Ballet and peer NPAP organisations - are able to fully leverage the opportunity, despite being the organisations most capable of delivering work at national and international scale.

Importantly, this challenge is not limited to major institutions. Theatre Network Australia’s Independent Dance Sector Report (2024) identifies that many dance works have short lives, with lost opportunities to maximise public and private investment through further presentation and touring, pointing to a systemic failure to support the full life cycle of works once they are created.

Artists and organisations at all levels experience the same structural problem: development is funded without adequate pathways to presentation; premieres occur without touring support; and successful works struggle to find resources for revival, regional reach or international exchange. Embedding a life-cycle approach would maximise the return on public investment, strengthen artistic ambition across the sector, and ensure that Australia’s most significant works are able to reach audiences at home and abroad over their full creative lives.

Pillar 3 – Centrality of the Artist (*and Arts Worker*)

Recommendation 3: Nation-wide industry-led skills and training initiatives

Sustaining excellence in dance and live performance requires industry-led skills and training frameworks that support both artists and arts workers across the full spectrum of contemporary practice - artistic, technical, health and safety, and leadership capabilities. Increasingly, this also includes the skills required to run a creative business: compliance, legal and risk management, governance, digital systems, and the responsible adoption of emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence.

Artists rarely operate in a single role. Across the sector, they are also educators, mentors, producers, cultural workers, community connectors and small-business operators. Supporting arts workers is therefore inseparable from supporting artists themselves—strengthening the conditions in which creative practice can be sustained, transmitted and shared within communities.

As a major employer of highly skilled artists and arts workers, The Australian Ballet experiences firsthand the growing complexity of maintaining these capabilities within live performance environments that are increasingly specialised, resource-intensive and risk-exposed. These pressures are felt most acutely by small-to-medium organisations, which carry significant responsibility for producing work, employing artists and arts workers, and developing practice, yet often do so without access to specialist business expertise or coordinated sector-wide training support.

By pooling expertise across organisations and jurisdictions, a nationally coordinated training framework could establish consistent standards, clearer career pathways and shared responsibility for skills development, rather than placing the burden solely on individual employers.

When presented with potential pathway interventions, 9 in 10 respondents - including teachers, studio owners, parents and students - indicated that a national mentorship program would improve participation pathways, with 65% reporting it would have “a lot” of impact.¹ These findings underscore the value of structured, nationally coordinated skills and mentoring frameworks that support artists not only at entry points, but across key transition moments in their careers.

Pillar 4 – Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Recommendation 4: Live Performance Production Incentive

The Australian Ballet strongly supports the introduction of a Live Performance Production Incentive, delivered as a refundable tax offset, to address the escalating financial risk of creating new Australian live performance work. Rising production, travel and labour costs, combined with increasingly volatile

¹ *Participation Pathways for Australian Dancers (2024)* Patternmakers

audience behaviour, have materially reduced the sector's capacity to invest in new work, particularly for not-for-profit companies whose business models do not allow risk to be amortised quickly or easily.

For dance in particular, the economics of creation are structurally misaligned with existing funding and tax settings. New productions require substantial upfront investment in artists, creatives, sets, costumes and technical development, while returns accrue gradually over multiple seasons, tours and revivals. Without mechanisms that actively reduce downside risk, companies are increasingly incentivised to prioritise smaller-scale or familiar repertoire, limiting artistic ambition.

Recommendation 5: Comprehensive mapping of the dance sector in Australia

Dance is a foundational component of Australia's cultural ecology, encompassing First Nations cultural dance, classical ballet, contemporary and independent practice, youth and community participation, and a substantial education and training pipeline. Despite its scale, reach and contribution, dance has historically had limited visibility within national cultural policy settings, resulting in an incomplete understanding of how the sector operates as an interconnected system.

The Australian Ballet recommends a government-led, cross-portfolio mapping of the Australian dance sector to establish a shared evidence base on workforce, participation, pathways and infrastructure. Such mapping would provide a clear picture of the relationships between major institutions, independent artists, training providers, touring networks and community participation, and of the pressures and dependencies that shape sustainability across the ecology.

Only government is positioned to undertake this work at the necessary scale and level of coordination, drawing on data and policy levers across portfolios including Arts, Education, Employment, Health, Infrastructure and Foreign Affairs and Trade. Comprehensive mapping would not be an end in itself, but an enabling framework to support more coherent investment, identify structural gaps in workforce and pathways, and align policy settings with the realities of how dance delivers public value.

A national map of the dance sector would allow government to move beyond piecemeal responses and toward strategic, coordinated policy settings—recognising dance not simply as a subset of the performing arts, but as a distinct, high-participation and globally legible cultural asset that contributes to wellbeing, social cohesion, education outcomes and cultural diplomacy.

Recommendation 6: 1.5x tax deductibility of donations

Increasing the tax deductibility of donations to 1.5 times the value of the gift would materially strengthen incentives for individual giving and address Australia's comparatively weak arts philanthropy environment. While Australians are culturally engaged, current tax settings provide limited encouragement for private giving to the arts relative to international peers and to other charitable causes. Enhanced deductibility would send a clear signal that cultural contribution is a valued public good, unlocking greater participation from small and mid-level donors and supporting the development of more resilient, diversified income streams for not-for-profit arts organisations.

The Australian Ballet has consistently advocated for this reform through previous tax and philanthropy consultation processes, drawing on direct experience of what motivates donors and where existing settings fall short. Stronger incentives for giving would amplify the impact of government funding and enabling organisations to reinvest in artistic excellence, education, workforce development and community engagement. This position aligns with broader sector advocacy and reflects a practical, proven mechanism to grow private support without distorting markets or creating undue administrative burden.

Recommendation 7: GST reform for tickets

Current GST arrangements operate as a direct cost on participation for many not-for-profit performing arts organisations, particularly those that are structurally loss-making yet publicly oriented in their purpose and delivery. For these organisations, GST on ticket sales reduces net revenue that would otherwise be reinvested in artistic work, workforce sustainability and access initiatives. In practice, this constrains pricing flexibility, limits the capacity to absorb rising costs, and can place upward pressure on ticket prices.

Targeted GST reform for not-for-profit performing arts organisations would improve financial sustainability and audience access without distorting commercial markets. By removing or reducing a tax impost that functions as a penalty on cultural participation, reform would allow organisations to better balance affordability with viability, particularly in regional touring, education programs and community-facing work. For The Australian Ballet and peer organisations, such reform would strengthen the link between public investment, earned income and cultural outcomes ensuring that tax settings support, rather than undermine, the delivery of public benefit through live performance.

Recommendation 8: Extension of Public Benevolent Institution (PBI) status

The Australian Ballet supports extending PBI-equivalent tax settings, including access to FBT concessions, to eligible not-for-profit arts and cultural organisations that demonstrably deliver public benefit and operate with workforce characteristics comparable to charities in health, education and social services. Arts organisations generate sustained civic value through cultural participation, education, wellbeing and community connection; however, the current exclusion from PBI-type settings constrains their capacity to sustain the specialist professional workforce required to deliver that value. Expanding access to these settings would recognise the arts as essential public benefit infrastructure, aligning tax treatment with contribution rather than sector classification.

This issue is particularly acute in artforms such as ballet, where delivery relies on a highly trained, interdependent workforce spanning artistic, technical and organisational roles, and where the intensity, physical demands and long training pathways of performers must be supported by equally specialised capability in production, finance, health, development and leadership. Yet arts organisations compete for these skills without access to the remuneration tools available to PBI-endorsed entities, creating a structural disadvantage in attracting and retaining staff - especially in professional and managerial roles where competition from other sectors is most acute. Over time, this undermines workforce stability, organisational capability and the sustainability of the broader arts ecology.

The Australian Ballet has consistently advanced this position through previous policy processes, including its submission to *The Art of Tax* reform process and more recent advocacy on philanthropy settings, drawing on direct experience of workforce pressure and talent loss driven by inequitable tax treatment. Extending PBI-equivalent settings would give practical effect to the National Cultural Policy's emphasis on the centrality of artists and arts workers, and on strong, resilient cultural institutions capable of delivering long-term public value.

Recommendation 9: Expand international touring as cultural diplomacy and national capability

International touring by Australian dance companies contributes directly to Australia's cultural diplomacy objectives, strengthening people-to-people relationships and projecting national values through artistic exchange. In 2025, The Australian Ballet toured internationally - returning to Japan for the first time in fifteen years, reinforcing long-standing international relationships and Australia's reputation for artistic excellence. Such activity complements the work of government across portfolios including Foreign Affairs

and Trade, education and tourism, while providing critical professional development and market pathways for Australian artists and arts workers.

However, the viability of international touring has been significantly affected by rising travel, freight and accommodation costs, alongside increased logistical and risk pressures. Without targeted policy support that reflects contemporary cost structures, international touring risks becoming increasingly episodic rather than strategic. Sustained investment would restore international touring as a core national capability - supporting cultural diplomacy, export readiness and long-term international engagement - while ensuring that Australia's most significant dance works are able to circulate globally as enduring cultural assets rather than isolated events.

Pillar 5 – Engaging the Audience

Recommendation 10: National plan for arts and music education

In dance, early audience engagement has distinctive long-term effects: it shapes physical literacy, aspiration and career imagination, meaning that access initiatives simultaneously support future audiences, educators and artists. A coordinated National Plan for Arts and Music is critical to equitable access, sustained participation and long-term audience development, as consistently identified across submissions from the performing arts sector.

National participation data, including the AusPlay survey, consistently shows that dance has one of the highest participation rates in Australia, with particularly strong engagement among children and young people. This level of participation delivers wide-ranging benefits across physical and mental health, wellbeing, creative expression, education and social connection, and provides a powerful foundation for future cultural engagement. However, without a coordinated national framework, high participation does not reliably translate into equitable access to live performance, professional pathways or sustained audience development.

Embedding dance within a National Plan for Arts and Music would recognise participation as foundational cultural infrastructure and ensure stronger alignment between grassroots engagement, education, professional practice and audience development. This approach would directly support the National Cultural Policy's commitments to equity, access and engaging the audience, while leveraging one of Australia's most inclusive and impactful artforms to build resilient future audiences and cultural connection nationwide.

Participation pathways research reinforces that early engagement with live performance is a decisive factor in sustaining both future audiences and future artists. Many students, particularly in regional and outer-metropolitan areas, report having never seen a professional ballet performance until targeted interventions such as regional touring or school-linked access occurred. Educators consistently describe these moments as transformative, making professional pathways "clearer and more realistic" for students and families alike.² Embedding dance within a National Plan for Arts and Music would therefore strengthen the continuum from participation to attendance to professional aspiration, ensuring that high participation rates translate into equitable access and long-term engagement.

Recommendation 11: Commission a national 'Social Prescribing for Arts' framework

A national approach to social prescribing³ that explicitly includes arts and cultural participation would embed culture within Australia's broader health and wellbeing infrastructure. The current National Cultural Policy already recognises that engagement with the arts - across music, performance, dance,

² *Participation Pathways for Australian Dancers (2024)* Patternmakers

visual arts and storytelling - can support improved mental health, healthy ageing, social connection and community resilience, in both clinical and non-clinical settings. Building on this foundation, a national social prescribing framework would enable health and community services to formally refer individuals to arts experiences and participatory programs, recognising cultural engagement as a legitimate, preventative and complementary pathway to improved wellbeing rather than an optional add-on.

Importantly, this is an emerging policy and research space in Australia, with growing cross-sector collaboration between health, social services and the arts. The Australian Research Council-funded Linkage research on social prescribing which brings together the Centre for Social Impact, the Caring Futures Institute at Flinders University and multiple sector partners, signals the increasing maturity of this field and the opportunity for Australia to develop an internationally distinctive model that integrates arts and culture from the outset.

While still evolving, this work points to the potential for robust evidence-building, shared measurement frameworks and scalable partnerships that connect cultural organisations with primary care, aged care, disability and community health settings. A nationally coordinated approach would allow cultural organisations, including major performing arts institutions, to participate in pilot programs, contribute practice-based knowledge, and help ensure that social prescribing pathways are culturally rich, accessible and artist-led, rather than narrowly therapeutic.

Recommendation 12: ‘See It Live’ Cultural Pass

A national ‘See It Live’ Cultural Pass for people aged 13–25 would provide a targeted, demand-side mechanism to rebuild and grow future audiences for live performance at a critical life stage. Young people consistently express strong interest in live cultural experiences, yet cost-of-living pressures are a primary barrier to attendance, particularly for those who are students, early in their working lives, or from lower-income households.

A government-funded Cultural Pass would reduce this barrier by enabling discounted or free access to live performances and participatory experiences, supporting young people to establish habits of attendance, experimentation and cultural participation that underpin long-term audience development. Live Performance Australia and the Network of National Dance Organisations both identify affordability as a key constraint on youth engagement and argue for a nationally consistent Cultural Pass as part of rebuilding audience demand.

For dance in particular, early exposure is essential not only to audience growth but to sustaining future workforce pathways. Engagement with live performance at a young age supports physical literacy, creative confidence and cultural connection, while also helping young people to imagine creative careers as viable and valued. Positioned alongside school-based access initiatives, a Cultural Pass would give young people agency to independently discover live performance beyond formal education settings. Framed as a national pilot, ‘See It Live’ would allow government to test uptake, equity impacts and audience behaviour, while delivering immediate benefits to young audiences and supporting the long-term sustainability of Australia’s live performance ecology.

Recommendation 13: Strengthen domestic dance touring for social connection and participation

Domestic touring is a primary mechanism through which dance delivers public value across geography, age and background. It supports social cohesion by enabling shared cultural experience, reduces structural inequities in access to live performance, and plays a critical role in clarifying education and workforce pathways - particularly for young people in regional and outer-metropolitan communities.

In 2025, The Australian Ballet On Tour and Education and Outreach programs delivered 96 performances, reaching more than 20,000 people across metropolitan, regional and remote communities nationwide. These touring performances were complemented by 626 workshops and participatory activities, engaging a further nearly 16,000 participants through schools programs, community residencies, masterclasses, open rehearsals and post-show conversations. Together, this integrated model demonstrates a wrap-around approach to audience engagement, where touring performances are reinforced by education-led and participatory activity that deepens connection, builds skills and sustains relationships with communities over time.

For dance, touring is not only an audience strategy but a structural pathway intervention. Evidence from participation and education research consistently shows that seeing professional dance live is a decisive factor in shaping aspiration, understanding of professional practice, and the perceived viability of creative careers. Secure, multiyear investment in domestic touring would enable organisations to plan strategically, return to communities, deepen partnerships with schools and local presenters, and strengthen the continuum from participation to professional practice. Positioned in this way, domestic touring functions as social and cultural infrastructure - supporting cohesion, access and long-term capability across the dance ecology.

Our Commitment

The Australian Ballet offers this submission not only from the perspective of a national institution, but from sustained proximity to the realities of dance practice—where policy settings are felt directly in bodies, careers and communities over time.

Dance is an artform in which the abstract becomes embodied. It is shaped by gravity, repetition, injury, recovery, ageing and interdependence. Decisions made at the level of policy register in the length of a dancer's career, in whether training pathways remain open or fracture, in whether artists and arts workers can sustain a life of practice without disproportionate personal cost. Cultural policy is not simply a framework for activity, but a set of conditions that determines whose bodies are supported, whose labour is valued, and whose stories are able to endure.

From The Australian Ballet's vantage point, the strength of the dance ecology is inseparable from the wellbeing of the people within it. Excellence in ballet and dance is not produced through isolated moments of performance. It is built through long-term investment in human capability - across artists, teachers, technicians, creatives and leaders - held within institutions and communities that allow practice to mature over time. When systems are misaligned, the consequences are cumulative: talent is lost, pathways narrow, and the cultural inheritance available to future generations is diminished.

Dance reminds us of what it means to be human: to move together, to witness effort and vulnerability, to carry knowledge through the body, and to connect across difference without words. These qualities are not incidental to national life; they are foundational to wellbeing, social cohesion and cultural continuity. A cultural policy that recognises this does more than support an artform. It affirms the value of human expression, care and connection as central to Australia's shared future.