

Submission to the National Cultural Policy Public Consultation

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I write as a researcher and design practitioner with close to twenty years' experience in creative industries education, where I have held senior academic leadership roles. My recent work spans cultural research, higher education governance, and equity and access in creative education.

This submission responds primarily to Pillar 2 (*A Place for Every Story*) and Pillar 4 (*Strong Cultural Infrastructure*), with implications for Pillar 3 (*Centrality of the Artist*). It is also informed throughout by the principles of Pillar 1 (*First Nations First*), particularly the embedding of Indigenous place-based methodologies across creative education and practice.

The outer-urban gap persists. Revive rightly acknowledged that suburban and outer-urban communities often experience limited access to arts and cultural infrastructure, and named local government as a key player in place-based practice. That intent was welcome. However, in practice, the major investments and funding mechanisms under Revive have continued to flow to inner-city national institutions on one hand and regional and remote programs on the other, through vehicles like the Regional Arts Fund, Festivals Australia, and dedicated regional infrastructure commitments. Outer-urban areas like Western Sydney remain caught in a structural gap: not "regional" enough to access regional funding, yet far from the concentration of metropolitan institutions and infrastructure. Federal arts funding between 2015 and 2022 amounted to just \$7.59 per person in Western Sydney compared to \$54.95 in the rest of Sydney.¹ At the state level, Western Sydney received \$12.08 per person compared to \$86.79 in Eastern Sydney.² The next policy needs funding mechanisms that recognise outer-urban areas as a distinct geography with distinct needs, not a residual category between metro and regional.

Creative education is cultural infrastructure. With only three institutions offering tertiary creative arts education in Western Sydney compared to seventeen in eastern Sydney,³ there is a significant structural gap in the region's cultural infrastructure. A region without accessible creative arts education faces the same kind of deficit as a region without a gallery or performance venue: the capacity to develop, retain, and renew creative talent locally is diminished, and participation in the creative economy narrows to those who can afford to travel or relocate. My experience building community-engaged creative programs showed that when creative education is embedded locally, responsive to the region's cultural diversity, its Indigenous heritage, and its communities of practice, it produces graduates who strengthen the creative workforce from within. It also generates cultural participation in its own right: students working on live briefs with local arts organisations, cultural institutions, and community partners are already contributing to the cultural life of their communities before they graduate, in ways that build lasting networks and capacity.

Revive engaged with education in important but specific ways: funding specialist in-school arts programs, committing to the Universities Accord review, and establishing a Jobs and Skills Council covering the creative sector. These were valuable, but they treated education as either a schools pipeline issue or a macro higher education funding question. They did not address how creative education is designed and delivered locally, or recognise the role universities play as partners within local creative ecosystems.

The next policy should recognise universities and other education providers as part of the cultural infrastructure it is trying to build, not as someone else's portfolio. In practice, this means valuing the partnerships with local councils, arts centres, Indigenous communities, and cultural institutions that make place-responsive creative education possible. It also means recognising that not every aspiring creative

¹ Xia, V., Smith, A., Sandbach, K., Merrillees, D., Perry, N., & Itaoui, R. (2024). *Unleashing Creativity: Strategies for Growing Western Sydney's Creative Industries*. Western Sydney University, p. 40.

² Xia et al. (2024), p. 40.

³ Xia et al. (2024), p. 33.

practitioner needs or wants a three-year degree. The creative ecosystem needs a range of pathways that meet people where they are: short courses and micro-credentials that train novices, professional development programs that build leadership in established practitioners, and well-supported VET-to-higher-education pathways for those who do want to pursue further study. In regions like Western Sydney, where many aspiring creative practitioners come through TAFE and community-based training, the absence of flexible, well-articulated pathways represents a gap in cultural infrastructure, not just an education policy problem. Recognition of prior learning, targeted funding, and genuine collaboration between VET providers, universities, and arts organisations would strengthen the creative ecosystem from within.

Indigenous knowledge must be embedded, not bolted on. Cultural policy should support the embedding of Indigenous methodologies across creative education and practice, not as an addition, but as foundational to how we understand and develop creative places, led by First Nations communities.

From what I have seen, the most effective approaches are those where Indigenous methodologies become structuring frameworks for entire programs, not content modules within otherwise unchanged curricula. When Indigenous ways of knowing shape how a whole subject is taught, grounding creative practice in cultural, ecological, and spiritual relationships to place, it transforms how students understand their responsibilities as practitioners. Similarly, on-Country learning led by Traditional Owners, where students, academics, and community members work together under Indigenous guidance, demonstrates what genuine knowledge exchange looks like in practice. These are not supplementary activities; they reshape the pedagogical foundations of creative disciplines.

This kind of embedding requires sustained investment. It depends on long-term relationships with Traditional Owners and Indigenous practitioners, on institutional willingness to restructure curricula rather than simply add to them, and on funding that supports First Nations leadership roles within creative education: as knowledge-keepers, as curriculum partners, and as practitioners shaping the next generation of creative workers. Current funding structures rarely recognise or support this work adequately.

First Nations leadership in creative education needs dedicated pathways. The consultation paper rightly asks how cultural policy can support pathways for First Nations leadership across the cultural landscape – creative education offers an important but underrecognised site for this. In practice, First Nations leadership in creative education takes many forms: Indigenous entrepreneurs-in-residence who embed principles of relationality, collective responsibility, and deep listening into programs; Traditional Owners who lead on-Country learning as co-educators; and Indigenous creative practitioners and knowledge holders who shape curriculum frameworks from the ground up. These roles are not symbolic. They fundamentally alter what students learn, how they learn it, and who they understand themselves to be as creative practitioners. The next policy should recognise and invest in First Nations leadership within creative education as part of the broader cultural infrastructure, not as a separate stream.

What I would like to see reflected in the next National Cultural Policy:

1. Funding mechanisms that recognise outer-urban areas as a distinct geography, closing the gap between metro and regional investment streams
2. Education providers recognised as part of Australia's cultural infrastructure, with investment in place-responsive creative education, expanded flexible pathways (including short courses, professional development, and VET-to-higher-education articulation), and the local partnerships that sustain them
3. Indigenous methodologies embedded across creative education and practice, led by First Nations communities, with dedicated funding for the leadership roles and long-term relationships this requires