

SUBMISSION TO THE

National Cultural Policy Consultation 2026

Submitted by

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INTRODUCTION

I welcome the opportunity to contribute to Australia's next National Cultural Policy. I write as Head of Film and Television at JMC Academy's Melbourne campus — a practitioner-educator with over a decade of experience leading screen education, and an active producer with credits spanning documentary, short film, and independent feature film production. I am a regular presenter at ASPERA, the peak body for screen education in Australia, where I have addressed the systemic skills shortage in our screen industry and the urgent need to reform how we train and transition emerging practitioners into professional careers.

This submission addresses a specific and urgent structural problem at the intersection of higher education and the screen industry: the absence of a coherent, government-backed framework enabling current film and television students to undertake paid, embedded work integrated learning (WIL) placements as part of their degrees. I argue that this gap undermines all five pillars of Revive — and that the new National Cultural Policy represents a genuine opportunity to close it.

THE PROBLEM: A STRUCTURAL DISJUNCT BETWEEN EDUCATION AND INDUSTRY

[Revive Pillar: Strong Cultural Infrastructure | The Centrality of the Artist]

Australia's higher education system produces thousands of film, television, and digital media graduates each year. These students invest significantly in their education — through HECS-HELP or FEE-HELP debt, through years of committed study. Yet when they seek real-world production experience while studying, they encounter a system that is, at best, inconsistent and, at worst, actively exclusionary.

The core problem is this: meaningful work integrated learning opportunities in the screen industry are difficult to obtain, spasmodic in their availability, and typically tied to specific units of study that students must enrol in — and pay for — as part of their degree. Yet the most significant paid placement schemes, offered through Screen Australia and state screen agencies, generally require applicants to have already completed their education. Students currently enrolled in a degree are largely excluded.

This creates an untenable situation. A student who wants to gain professional production experience while studying faces three options:

- Take a leave of absence or defer their degree to become eligible for paid placement schemes — interrupting their studies, losing momentum, and accruing additional costs.
- Attempt to access ad hoc, unpaid, or poorly supported placements through individual institutional relationships — which are inconsistent, inequitable, and often educationally unsupervised.
- Forgo the experience entirely and graduate without the professional readiness the industry requires.

None of these options serves students, institutions, or the industry well. Strong cultural infrastructure — one of Revive's five pillars — must include the human infrastructure: the training pipelines, the transition pathways, and the institutional frameworks that ensure a continuous supply of skilled, work-ready practitioners. The skills gap between graduating students and the demands of a professional production environment is not a failure of effort or intent — it is a structural policy failure that the new National Cultural Policy must address.

THE EQUITY DIMENSION

[Revive Pillar: First Nations First | A Place for Every Story]

This structural problem has a direct and serious equity dimension. Unpaid or poorly supported placements disproportionately advantage students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds who can afford to work without pay, absorb the cost of additional study units, or take extended leave from their degrees. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, regional and remote areas, First Nations communities, and other underrepresented groups are disproportionately excluded.

A National Cultural Policy that genuinely places First Nations First and aspires to create A Place for Every Story cannot afford to maintain a training and entry pathway system that systematically privileges the already-privileged. The stories that do not get told are not simply an absence of content — they are the product of structural barriers that prevent the storytellers from ever reaching the profession. Paid, embedded WIL placements accessible to students while they are studying are not simply an industry efficiency measure. They are an equity and access imperative, and a precondition for the diverse screen workforce that both policy pillars demand.

INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON: THE UK'S SCREENSKILLS MODEL

[Revive Pillar: Strong Cultural Infrastructure]

The United Kingdom offers a useful comparative reference point. Faced with similar challenges — crew shortages, access barriers, and a highly freelance production sector — the UK established ScreenSkills as a dedicated industry body for screen workforce development, funded through contributions from productions and broadcasters.

ScreenSkills operates several relevant mechanisms:

ScreenSkills Select

An industry accreditation and employability framework for UK universities offering screen courses. It endorses courses, provides placement guidelines, connects institutions with industry partners, and supports work-integrated learning. It does not centrally place students,

but provides the structural framework within which universities and employers can operate with clarity and confidence.

Trainee Finder

A paid placement scheme offering structured positions on film, high-end television, and children's productions, funded partly through industry skills levies. Notably, current eligibility rules exclude students still enrolled in full-time education — a limitation increasingly criticised in the UK for its access and equity implications, and one that mirrors Australia's own structural gap.

Industry Levy-Funded Initiatives

ScreenSkills administers a range of placement initiatives — including Film Forward, Make A Move, and Centres of Excellence — providing paid, supervised placements with formal training plans, funded through broadcaster and streamer contributions.

The UK model is instructive not because it has solved the problem — it has not — but because it demonstrates what a coordinated, levy-funded, industry-government framework can look like in a screen sector of comparable scale and structure to Australia's. The UK is actively debating extending paid placement access to current students, driven by the same arguments that apply here: skills shortages, equity concerns, and the inadequacy of traditional graduate entry routes in a freelance, project-based industry.

BUILDING ON THE STREAMING CONTENT REQUIREMENT: THE MISSING WORKFORCE COMPONENT

[Revive Pillar: Strong Cultural Infrastructure | Reaching the Audience]

The passage of the Communications Legislation Amendment (Australian Content Requirement for Subscription Video On Demand (Streaming) Services) Bill in November 2025 was a landmark achievement — the product of a decade of industry advocacy. Requiring major streaming services with more than one million Australian subscribers to invest at least 10% of their total program expenditure, or 7.5% of their Australian revenue, in new local content is a significant and welcome reform.

However, the legislation addresses what gets made — it does not address who gets trained to make it. The content expenditure obligation is now in place. The workforce development obligation is not. This is the critical gap the new National Cultural Policy must close.

The production pipeline that the streaming content requirement will generate — already estimated at close to \$100 million annually from Netflix alone — will increase demand for skilled Australian crew at precisely the moment when the industry faces its most serious skills shortage in decades. Without a parallel investment in workforce development and student placement pathways, the risk is that the content obligation primarily benefits established practitioners while doing nothing to address the structural barriers facing the next generation.

I strongly advocate for the new National Cultural Policy to extend the streaming content framework to include a workforce development component — specifically:

- A skills and training levy attached to the streaming content obligation, requiring services above the threshold to contribute a proportion of their content expenditure to a national screen workforce development fund.
- A dedicated stream within that fund for embedded, paid student placements — structured in partnership with accredited higher education providers — ensuring the production activity generated by the content obligation creates direct, accessible, and educationally supervised opportunities for current students.

- A requirement that productions receiving streamer-funded spend above a defined threshold allocate a proportion of their below-the-line labour budgets to accredited student traineeships — creating a direct and scalable pipeline between the content obligation and the next generation of practitioners.

This is not a radical proposition. The legislative infrastructure is already in place. The content spend is mandated. The next step is ensuring that spend builds the workforce that will sustain Australian screen production for decades to come — and reaches the audience with stories made by a genuinely diverse and replenished creative workforce.

A NATIONAL ACCREDITATION FRAMEWORK FOR SCREEN WIL

[Revive Pillar: Strong Cultural Infrastructure | The Centrality of the Artist]

Alongside the funding mechanism, Australia needs the structural framework to administer paid placements effectively. I advocate for the establishment of a national accreditation framework for screen work integrated learning, modelled on the UK's ScreenSkills Select, administered through a partnership between screen agencies, industry bodies, and higher education peak bodies.

Such a framework should:

- Accredit university screen courses against industry-relevant placement standards, creating a verified quality mark for courses that deliver genuine industry readiness.
- Provide clear legal and administrative frameworks for paid student placements — including workers compensation, intellectual property, supervision, duty of care, and assessment standards — removing the ambiguity that currently discourages producers from engaging students.
- Create a verified register of industry employers approved to host accredited student placements, making it easier for both students and producers to identify and access appropriate opportunities.
- Enable paid WIL credits to be formally recognised within AQF-accredited degrees, so that students are not academically penalised for time spent on professional sets.
- Establish standardised supervision and assessment frameworks ensuring placement experiences are educationally rigorous and genuinely skills-building — not simply cheap labour.

THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

[Revive Pillar: The Centrality of the Artist | Strong Cultural Infrastructure]

Institutions like JMC Academy are already doing what they can within existing constraints. Our Film and Television department has developed internship partnerships with companies including NEP Australia, Princess Pictures, Guesswork, and Fremantle Television — and I have presented at ASPERA conferences on the systemic skills shortage and the role of education in addressing it. But these efforts are ad hoc, institution-dependent, and unevenly available to students.

Practitioner-led teaching — where departments are staffed by working producers, directors, and editors with active industry careers — is the foundation of what we do. But practitioner-led teaching alone cannot substitute for the embodied, applied learning that comes from

working on a real production. When a student manages a location, negotiates with a post-production facility, or navigates on-set protocol for the first time under professional supervision, they are acquiring knowledge that no classroom exercise can replicate. The centrality of the artist — another of Revive's five pillars — must extend to the emerging artist: the student who is not yet in the industry but is actively being trained to enter it.

Higher education institutions are ready and willing to be genuine partners in a national paid placement framework. What we need is the policy architecture — the funding mechanisms, the legal clarity, and the industry incentives — that makes it possible to deliver that framework at scale and with equity.

FIRST NATIONS STORYTELLING, CULTURAL DIVERSITY & REACHING THE AUDIENCE

[Revive Pillar: First Nations First | A Place for Every Story | Reaching the Audience]

A National Cultural Policy that places First Nations First must invest in the institutions and pathways that train the next generation of storytellers. Embedding First Nations perspectives and protocols into screen curricula requires not only curriculum reform but the creation of pathways through which First Nations students can access professional production experience without being forced to choose between their studies and their careers.

Paid WIL placements, accessible while studying, are a direct and practical contribution to this goal. They reduce the financial and structural barriers that disproportionately affect First Nations students and students from underrepresented communities, and they create the conditions for a genuinely diverse screen workforce — one that reflects the full breadth of Australian experience and storytelling, and that can reach Australian audiences with stories that are authentically and diversely theirs.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The Australian screen industry faces a well-documented and worsening skills shortage. The students who will address that shortage are currently enrolled in film and television degrees at institutions across the country. The landmark streaming content legislation has created the production pipeline. The new National Cultural Policy must now create the workforce pipeline to service it.

Against each of the five pillars of Revive, I urge the Government to commit to:

- First Nations First: Dedicated resourcing within any paid WIL framework for First Nations students and communities, developed in genuine partnership with First Nations practitioners and screen organisations.
- A Place for Every Story: Equity-centred design of placement frameworks, ensuring students from all backgrounds — not just the financially privileged — can access paid professional experience while studying.
- The Centrality of the Artist: Recognition of higher education as a core site of cultural production, and of the emerging artist-practitioner as central to Australia's creative future.
- Strong Cultural Infrastructure: A national screen WIL accreditation framework modelled on ScreenSkills Select; a skills and training levy attached to the streaming content

obligation; and legislative clarity establishing a specific classification for screen industry student placements.

- Reaching the Audience: Ensuring the production activity mandated by the streaming content requirement is matched by investment in the workforce that will produce it — so that Australian audiences continue to receive stories made by skilled, diverse, and replenished Australian creative practitioners.

These are practical, achievable, and internationally precedented reforms. The streaming content requirement has ensured that Australian stories will be made. The workforce development framework advocated here will ensure there are skilled, diverse, and production-ready Australians to make them. I commend this submission to the consultation process and welcome any opportunity to discuss these recommendations further.

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