



Submission to the National Cultural Policy Consultation May 2026

Submitted by: Kelly Young, President of Drama NSW, [REDACTED]

Drama NSW is the official professional body representing teachers of Drama in NSW. We are run by, and for primary, secondary and tertiary teachers, drama practitioners, and researchers. We support teachers through professional learning, curriculum advocacy, conferences, resources, networks and opportunities that strengthen Drama education across schools, universities and communities. Drama NSW is affiliated with Drama Australia and the International Drama/Theatre and Education Association.

As a professional association, we witness daily the profound impact of the arts, especially arts education. Arts education is not an optional enrichment activity. It is the foundation through which young people first encounter themselves as artists, audiences, makers, interpreters, collaborators and cultural citizens. Across arts modalities, students learn to communicate, create, perform, respond, analyse, imagine and make meaning. These capabilities are essential to a vibrant cultural democracy.

Drama NSW endorses the broader position advanced by the National Advocates for Arts Education that arts education must be recognised as essential national infrastructure, not as a peripheral or assumed outcome of cultural policy. Drama NSW supports the call for Australia's next National Cultural Policy to include a dedicated education pillar: Arts Learning, Training and Pathways. The NAAE submission identifies a critical structural gap: arts education is acknowledged in policy, but not embedded as a core area of design, investment or accountability. The NAAE recommends a sixth pillar, a National Inquiry into Arts Education and Training, funding for arts professional associations, and a national Arts Education Working Group jointly led by the Office of the Arts and the Department of Education.

Drama NSW strongly supports the establishment of a National Inquiry into Arts Education and Training. Australia needs a coordinated, cross-portfolio evidence base to understand the current state of arts learning across early childhood, schooling, tertiary education, teacher education, community arts and workforce pathways. This inquiry should examine participation, provision, access, equity, teacher supply, professional learning, tertiary pathways and workforce sustainability. It should also foreground the voices of young people, educators, First Nations artists and educators, professional associations, researchers and communities experiencing barriers to access.

Drama NSW also strongly supports the creation of a national Arts Education Working Group, jointly led by the Office of the Arts and the Department of Education, with meaningful sector representation. This group would help ensure that arts education does not continue to fall between portfolios. It would provide the coordination needed to translate national cultural policy into practical action across systems, schools, teacher education, tertiary pathways and professional learning.

Professional associations, peak bodies and service organisations must be funded as part of Australia's arts education infrastructure. Organisations such as Drama NSW provide the connective tissue between policy, curriculum, classroom practice, teacher professional learning, research, advocacy and the broader arts sector. They sustain communities of practice, develop teacher capacity, support curriculum implementation, and create opportunities for educators and students to engage with current arts practice. Yet much of this work is carried by volunteer labour or short-term project energy. If Australia is serious about strengthening arts education, then professional associations need stable, long-term investment to support professional learning, regional outreach, resource development, mentoring, research translation and partnerships between educators, artists and cultural organisations.

Equitable access to high-quality arts education, including Drama, must be a national priority. Access should not depend on postcode, school resourcing, family income, sector, or whether a school has specialist arts teachers. Young people in regional, remote, low socio-economic and under-resourced communities deserve the same access to rich, sustained arts learning as their peers. Drama is particularly important because it is an embodied, collaborative and relational artform. Through role, story, improvisation, performance and reflection, young people learn to explore ideas, rehearse perspectives, communicate with confidence and engage with the complexity of human experience. Drama strengthens creativity, empathy, cultural understanding, critical thinking, wellbeing and civic participation. A national cultural policy committed to "a place for every story" must recognise schools as one of the most important places where those stories are first imagined, developed and shared.

Youth voice, educator voice and First Nations cultural authority must be embedded in policy design and implementation. Young people are not only future artists and audiences. They are artists, audiences, storytellers and cultural participants now. Their experiences of access, exclusion, identity, belonging and creative possibility should inform national decision-making. Educators must also be recognised as cultural workers who enact policy in classrooms, studios, rehearsal rooms, theatres and community spaces every day. Their professional knowledge is essential to understanding what is possible, what is missing, and what support is required. First Nations cultural authority must also be central, ensuring that First Nations artists, educators, communities and knowledge holders lead decisions about how First Nations stories, practices, languages, histories and cultural knowledges are taught, shared and sustained.

Drama NSW therefore recommends that the National Cultural Policy:

1. Establish Arts Learning, Training and Pathways as a sixth pillar.
2. Commission a National Inquiry into Arts Education and Training.
3. Establish a national Arts Education Working Group jointly led by the Office of the Arts and the Department of Education.
4. Provide sustained funding for arts education professional associations, peak bodies and service organisations.

5. Strengthen equitable access to high-quality arts education across Australia, including Drama.
6. Embed youth voice, educator voice and First Nations cultural authority in policy design, implementation and evaluation.

Drama education helps young people imagine, rehearse and create more humane futures. It must be recognised, resourced and protected as part of Australia's cultural landscape.