

The [Centre for Research Equity & Advancement of Teaching & Education \(CREATE\)](#) at CQUniversity Australia welcomes the opportunity to contribute to Australia's next National Cultural Policy. As a research centre embedded within a regionally-based university with campuses across Queensland and New South Wales, we offer this submission from the frontline of arts education and cultural practice in regional Australia. Our focus is Pillars 3 and 4, and our core argument is this: the next National Cultural Policy must deliberately activate and sustain creative life in regional Australia, ensuring artists, arts educators and audiences in the regions can stay, be supported, and be included.

CQUniversity graduates work not only as performers and makers, but as teachers, community arts practitioners, and health arts workers — roles that sustain cultural life and social wellbeing in places metropolitan institutions do not reach. Supporting the artist as worker in regional settings means resourcing the training pathways through which those workers are made. Those pathways are under serious strain. Arts degree enrolments are at their lowest in recent years, with more than **50 Creative Arts programs discontinued nationally since 2018**. The Job-Ready Graduates pricing model pushed arts degrees to \$50,976 — a barrier falling hardest on CQUniversity's students: first-in-family to study at university, mature-age learners from farming, mining and working-class regional families. Pricing these students out of arts education removes regional voices from Australia's cultural future. We recommend the next policy weight funding for regional artists to reflect geographic disadvantage; invest in professional development pathways that do not require leaving regional communities; and restore equitable access to arts education by addressing the cost burden on regional students.

Regional cultural infrastructure — venues, organisations, training institutions — is thin, ageing and under sustained pressure. CQUniversity's campuses serve as physical and intellectual hubs for creative activity across our regions, hosting exhibitions, performances, residencies and public programs that would not otherwise occur. For students across Central Queensland, we are often the only viable pathway into professional arts and teacher training within hundreds of kilometres. Arts education is itself cultural infrastructure: the system through which participation begins, capability develops, and pathways into creative careers are established. Senior secondary arts enrolments have fallen by approximately **21% nationally between 2015 and 2023**, with the steepest inequities in regional and low socio-economic communities. Allowing this pipeline to contract further is a policy choice with permanent consequences for regional cultural capacity. Partnerships such as the Screen Queensland–CQUniversity collaboration demonstrate what is possible when government, industry and university work together: professional pathways that do not require regional students to relocate. These models deserve recognition, continuation and expansion under the next policy. We recommend the next policy establish a dedicated regional cultural infrastructure fund with long-term operational support; formally recognise regional universities as cultural infrastructure partners with Commonwealth co-investment mechanisms; and treat arts education as a cross-portfolio priority with clear accountability across Arts and Education.

Regional tertiary arts education is not a niche concern — it is a structural foundation on which a truly national cultural policy must rest. We urge the government to ensure the next policy reaches every place where stories are made and lives are shaped by culture.