



Drama Australia

Submission to the National Cultural Policy
consultation

May 2026

Drama Australia

Drama Australia is the national peak body for drama education in Australia, representing state and territory drama education associations and advocating for quality drama and theatre education across early childhood, school, tertiary and community contexts. Founded in 1976, the organisation supports educators, artists and researchers through advocacy, professional learning, publications and national collaboration. Drama Australia is a proud founding member of the National Advocates for Arts Education (NAAE).

Introduction

Drama Australia welcomes the Australian Government's continued commitment to arts and cultural policy through Revive and acknowledges the important recognition of arts education within the policy framework.

Arts education is fundamental to Australia's cultural, educational and economic future. It develops creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and communication, while fostering cultural understanding, identity, wellbeing and participation in cultural life. Arts education underpins the development of artists, audiences and the broader creative workforce that sustain Australia's cultural ecology.

However, arts education and training in Australia are in systemic decline. Participation in senior secondary Arts subjects has fallen significantly over the past decade, while tertiary Creative Arts provision continues to contract (Gattenhof & Saunders, 2026). Access to quality arts education remains uneven, particularly in regional, rural and low socio-economic communities, despite clear evidence that these students often benefit most from sustained engagement in the Arts.

Drama education, youth theatre, community theatre and applied theatre programs make a vital contribution to Australia's cultural life by fostering creativity, cultural participation, empathy and social connection. However, reductions in funding for community partnerships, small-to-medium arts organisations and youth arts companies have significantly reduced opportunities for participation, particularly in regional communities and for young people. Sustained investment in drama and theatre programs is essential not only for arts education, but for maintaining Australia's cultural vitality, creative workforce and future audiences.

While arts education is acknowledged within Revive, it is not yet embedded as a core pillar of policy design, investment or accountability. Without a coordinated national approach across Arts and Education portfolios, the foundations required to sustain Australia's cultural and creative life will continue to weaken. Drama Australia believes strengthening arts education, capacity building and training is essential to achieving the ambitions of Australia's National Cultural Policy.

Arts Education

Drama Australia recognises The Arts as a core learning area within the Australian Curriculum and state and territory curricula. The Arts learning area consists of five equal and discrete subjects: Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts.

The Australian Curriculum is explicit that all young Australians are entitled to engage with each of the five arts subjects throughout their schooling. However, this entitlement is not consistently realised. Too many Australian students miss out on sustained, high-quality arts education, including Drama, particularly in regional, rural and low socio-economic communities.

Drama Australia believes all children and young people deserve equitable access to quality arts education across early childhood, primary and secondary schooling. Each arts subject offers distinctive forms of knowledge, creativity and expression that enrich students' learning and lives.

Drama Education

Drama education is both a subject and a powerful mode of learning through which young people explore, interpret and communicate meaning about themselves and the world around them. Through role, movement, voice and performance, students engage with real and imagined experiences in active, embodied and collaborative ways. Drama education may include dramatic play, improvisation, role-play, text interpretation, devised performance and engagement with theatre and contemporary performance practices.

Drama is an educational discipline closely connected to theatre as a performing artform and to the broader cultural life of communities. While theatre often culminates in performance for an audience, drama education emphasises processes of inquiry, meaning-making and reflection as students create, interpret and share stories.

As one of the five arts subjects within the Australian Curriculum: The Arts, Drama supports students' intellectual, social, emotional and creative development. It develops creativity, empathy, communication, collaboration and critical thinking, while enabling students to engage with diverse stories, cultures and perspectives. Drama education also fosters confidence, cultural understanding and active citizenship, and develops transferable skills that support participation in education, community life and future employment.

The Benefits of Drama Education

A substantial national and international evidence base demonstrates the significant educational, social and cultural benefits of drama education. Research consistently shows that drama-based pedagogies positively impact literacy, academic achievement, wellbeing, creativity, communication and student engagement across a wide range of learning contexts. For example, a recent literature review commissioned by The Royal Shakespeare Company (Kitchen, 2026), entitled “The Benefits of In Schools Drama Education”, identified 13 sets of benefits reported within the 351 papers that met the review criteria including: empowerment and citizenship; agency; social skills and collaboration; critical thinking; creativity, cultural and aesthetic expressions; reading, writing and oracy; motivation and engagement; co-construction of knowledge; other meta skills (such as research skills, problem solving and interdisciplinarity); transfer of learning via drama pedagogies, including language learning and other subject areas including STEM and humanities; Drama and Theatre disciplinary knowledge and skills; and policy.

In other research, Drama education has been shown to:

- Develop creativity, collaboration, critical thinking and problem-solving capabilities essential for contemporary learning and work (Fineran & Anderson, 2019; Harris, 2018; Lee et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2020).
- Provide inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments that support diverse learners, including EAL/D students, Indigenous students and students with learning difficulties (Bryce et al., 2004.; Ewing, 2019; Dunn et al., 2019; Williams 2025).
- Support active citizenship and intercultural understanding by enabling students to engage critically with stories, identities, histories and diverse perspectives (Gardiner & Anderson, 2015; Davis, 2016; Walsh & Hatton, 2022; Winner et al., 2013).
- Improve literacy outcomes, including reading comprehension, oral language, vocabulary development, writing and inferential thinking (Ewing & Saunders, 2025; Lee et al., 2020; Güngör, 2008; Mastrothanas et al., 2023; Saunders, 2021).
- Strengthen verbal communication skills, confidence in speaking and students’ ability to communicate ideas effectively (Ewing, 2019; Beaumont, 2020; Podlozny, 2000).
- Increase student engagement and academic achievement, particularly in literacy and language-rich learning contexts (Walker et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2015).
- Support empathy, perspective-taking and social-emotional development through collaborative and embodied learning experiences (Davis & Dolan, 2016; Gray & Pascoe, 2026; Holochwost et al., 2024; O’Grady, 2020).
- Improve student wellbeing, confidence, motivation and sense of belonging, particularly for students experiencing disadvantage or disengagement from schooling (Dunn et al., 2019; Chapman, 2018; Gray et al., 2025).

Research also demonstrates that drama education can positively impact students' confidence, collaboration, resilience and engagement with schooling, while supporting the development of transferable skills that are highly valued across education, community and employment contexts.

Drama education is therefore not simply an enrichment activity. It is a research-informed and evidence-based area of learning that contributes significantly to young people's academic, social, emotional and cultural development.

Research published in many journals including Australia's own [NJ: Drama Australia Journal](#) has a close to 50 year history of documenting the impact of drama and Applied Theatre work. This body of work highlights the role drama and theatre can play in developing young people's confidence, agency and wellbeing, with drama and theatre providing important vehicles for promoting engagement within communities and cultural storytelling.

Recommendations for the Next National Cultural Policy

Drama Australia fully endorses the submission made by the National Advocates for Arts Education (NAAE), including its key recommendation and supporting actions.

Key Recommendation: Establish a sixth pillar within the National Cultural Policy: Arts Learning, Training and Pathways

This pillar would recognise arts education as essential national infrastructure and a shared responsibility across the Arts and Education portfolios. It would provide the policy coherence, visibility and accountability required to align existing commitments with practice.

Supporting Actions

Drama Australia supports the following actions proposed by NAAE:

- Commission a National Inquiry into Arts Education and Training to establish a coordinated, cross-portfolio evidence base and identify actions to strengthen participation, provision, equity and workforce sustainability.
- Develop a National Arts Education Strategy to align schooling, Initial Teacher Education, tertiary pathways and workforce development, with clear national targets, sustained investment and research.
- Embed First Nations leadership and cultural authority across arts education to ensure First Nations-led curriculum, training and pathways into arts and cultural sector roles.
- Fund arts education in schools to ensure universal access, including curriculum delivery, resources, arts teacher professional learning and a nationally coordinated

Artist-in-Schools and Teacher/artist program (see achievements from previous projects Gattenhof, 2012; Jones, 2015, Dunn et al, 2019).

- Strengthen the arts education workforce through targeted investment in teacher education, professional learning and workforce development to address shortages and reduce out-of-field teaching.
- Strengthen tertiary arts education and training pathways to stabilise and expand Creative Arts programs across universities and TAFEs, and strengthen pathways into arts careers and the creative workforce.
- Fund arts professional associations, peak bodies, service organisations and cultural institutions to expand access to high-quality arts learning, partnerships and outreach, particularly for students in regional, remote and disadvantaged communities.
- Establish a national Arts Education Working Group jointly led by the Office of the Arts and the Department of Education, with sector representation, to ensure a coordinated and cohesive national approach to arts education.

Conclusion

Arts education is the foundation upon which Australia's arts and cultural ecosystem is built. Without it, there are no future artists, no engaged audiences and no sustainable cultural infrastructure.

Strengthening arts education, participatory arts and capacity building programs are therefore not only an education priority, but a cultural policy imperative. Drama Australia believes the next National Cultural Policy must place arts learning, training and pathways at the centre of Australia's cultural future to ensure a vibrant, equitable and sustainable arts and cultural sector for generations to come.

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