

## Submission to Australia's New National Cultural Policy

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We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Parliament of Australia's Inquiry into the *Revive* National Cultural Policy. Our submission is informed through our perspective as tertiary educators working in a non-metropolitan region, our collective experiences in creative industry collaboration, and research-led inquiries into policy, creative practice and the cultural economy. In this submission we offer 12 recommendations and supporting commentary across the five pillars of *Revive*. Collectively these support a robust and equitable National Cultural Policy that accounts for the nuances and potential of both metropolitan and non-metropolitan cultural ecosystems and calls for cultural policy frameworks that (1) recognise the central role of education and research in sustaining these ecosystems, (2) address the structural precarity of creative labour, (3) support long-term, locally driven cultural production, and (4) incorporate non-metropolitan perspectives to contribute to a more inclusive and sustainable vision for Australia's creative future.

### Cultural economy as a reinvigorating engine for regional Australia

Cultural production is deeply embedded in place, identity, and local economies. Despite their significant economic contribution, compared to metropolitan areas, regional areas experience an unevenness in access to resources and infrastructure, audiences, and paid creative opportunities to support the transition from education to the labour market.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, although the economic and social value of the creative industries is recognised, there remains a tendency to privilege metropolitan growth models that emphasise narrow employment metrics and audience participation. Such approaches risk overlooking the complex, place-based realities of cultural production and creative education in regional Australia, where creative work is often conducted through hybrid roles, low or no-paid work, informal networks, and community-oriented practices.

Universities in non-metropolitan areas occupy a unique position in Australia's cultural ecosystem<sup>2</sup>. They meet the educational needs of students who are typically from lower socio-economic backgrounds by providing opportunities to participate in higher education while remaining in their region and by building pathways for graduates to remain and work in their communities after graduation.<sup>3</sup> In the creative sector, universities provide critical theoretical, creative and experiential education through traditional curricula and by offering a physical and symbolic platform for collaboration between students, communities and industries, including through work-integrated learning. Universities are a vital site for students to transition from education to community and industry, and for community and industry to seek and contribute to the development of creative expertise.

The University of the Sunshine Coast (UniSC) offers two comprehensive creative arts programs: a Bachelor of Creative Industries and a Bachelor of Music. Since the discontinuation of James Cook University's Bachelor of Arts' Creative Arts majors in 2023<sup>4</sup>, UniSC is one of two universities in Australia's northern regions offering creative arts programs. In this context, we acknowledge the ambitions of *Revive*, including its emphasis on First Nations storytelling, cultural infrastructure, and sector sustainability. However, although *Revive* articulates the importance of access and participation, it does not sufficiently address the structural disparities between metropolitan and regional cultural ecologies, particularly in relation to funding distribution, regional infrastructure investment, and regional workforce development pathways. The policy's framing of employment and industry growth risks reinforcing existing precarity by privileging market-oriented outcomes over the conditions required to sustain long-term, place-based creative careers in non-metropolitan settings. There is limited recognition of the important role universities play as key intermediaries in cultural ecosystems in relation to research, training, and regional cultural leadership.

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<sup>1</sup> Ward A, L Goold, B Luttrell & K Disney (2022) *Building a world class music ecosystem on the Sunshine Coast*. UniSC.

<sup>2</sup> Hands K & D Grant-Smith (in press) Creative career readiness: Preparing graduates for a precarious labor market. *Cultural Trends*.

<sup>3</sup> Regional Universities Network (2024) <https://run.edu.au/about-us/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://naae.org.au/news/creative-arts-and-arts-education-a-national-tertiary-snapshot-20182025>

#### Recommendation 1

The National Cultural Policy must recognise and provide adequate financial support for the central role of the education, research and leadership providing by universities sustaining creative ecosystems in metropolitan and regional locales.

### Supporting First Nations Arts Employment

Central to this pillar is the connection to culture and the cultural health and wellbeing of First Nations people through capacity building and skills development programs for First Nations creative practitioners seeking sustainable careers in the creative industries. *Revive* acknowledges skills gaps for technical First Nations arts employment associated with sound engineering. Addressing these goals would contribute to addressing the significant diversity, gender equity and representation issues currently present in the recording studio and other areas where sound engineering is a required skill. Encouraged by these goals, UniSC staff in collaboration with First Nations elder, Uncle Kev Starkey, developed the Music Producers Development Program for First Peoples capacity building program<sup>5</sup> with support from the university and the Queensland Government's *First Nations Cultural Fund*. This project revealed clear benefits associated with First Nations-led training programs for First Nations people in culturally appropriate capacity building programs.<sup>6</sup>

Music production is imbued with technological, musical, social, and psychological skills and is challenging pedagogically. With the addition of cultural protocols for First Peoples, the pedagogical complexity increases. The program deployed the AIATSIS research ethics framework<sup>7</sup> and was First Nations led from conception through to delivery and follow up. Over seven days the program delivered digital music production and recording skills, song making, Do It Yourself (DIY) approaches to recording and production, studio equipment and computer maintenance, and digital archiving. As a pilot study, it was delivered by seven Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentors and three UniSC music staff to five First Nations participants from regional Queensland.

At the end of each day a yarn was held to discuss the program outcomes, issues faced by First Nations people, and the goals of the mentors and participants. These yarns revealed nuanced and unique obstacles that First Nations people face when entering the recording studio, either as a producer or engineer, or attempting to find a suitable space to record. The participants and mentors found many challenges and frustrations in the recording sector including access to suitable housing and infrastructure, agency and cultural safety in recording studios, ongoing discrimination in the music industry, and lateral violence and jealousy around perceived success in their communities. Additionally, government efforts to support First Nations musicians through grants were met with tension. While more research is needed for First Nations participants in the recording studio, many of the participants acknowledged the positive outcomes and cultural wellbeing benefits as their skill and abilities in recording practice grew. The next iteration of *Revive* presents an opportunity to create more First Nations-led recording spaces through culturally appropriate training pathways enabling more First Nations people in decision-making roles in the studio.

#### Recommendation 2.

Include music production in the First Nations Creative Workforce Development Strategy so that First Nations artists can feel culturally safe in the vulnerable scenarios of the recording studio.

#### Recommendation 3

Provide financial and other support for the development of DIY recording skills to support more opportunities for First Nations-led recording to take place on Country in culturally safe environments.

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<sup>5</sup> The program received the Outstanding Community Work Award at the 2026 Music Producers and Engineers' Guild of Australia.

<https://nit.com.au/04-03-2026/22988/mpdp-program-honoured-at-music-producers-and-engineers-guild-of-australia-awards>

<sup>6</sup> Goold L, K Starkey, B Luttrell & A Ward (in press) Challenges and frustrations for Indigenous Australians participating in the recording sector. *Perfect Beat*.

<sup>7</sup> AIATSIS (2020) *AIATSIS code of ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research*. Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. <https://aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-10/aiatsis-code-ethics.pdf>

## Supporting Creative Worker Wellbeing at all Career Stages

The current political, social and artistic environment is primed for a review and deep consideration of how Australia values its artists. Recent years have shown how fragile creative careers have become: the Sabsabi and Dagostino case suggests political ideology appears to be preferred over merit<sup>8</sup>; the sudden closure of *Meanjin*<sup>9</sup>, demonstrates corporate interests are prioritised over longstanding cultural institutions; and the cancellation of Adelaide Writers Week reveals the volatility of organisational structures. Since the introduction of *Revive*, conditions for artists to engage with their audienceships and earn income and recognition have become increasingly unstable. These recent events are overlaid on decades of precarious labour conditions that successive national cultural policies have been unable to remedy. In these conditions, artists are inevitably solely responsible for producing artistic work and sustaining a creative career. Precarity and politicisation has made creative careers increasingly unviable, driving an exodus from the creative labour market and leaving a significant skills shortage. Without artists, the heart of the sector no longer exists.

The Australian creative economy employs 5.9% of the national workforce and is increasing at a faster rate than aggregate national employment. Between 2023 and 2024 the creative economy contributed \$67.4 billion to the Australian economy (2.5% of GDP)<sup>10</sup>. However, Australian creative industries are experiencing an acute critical skills and workforce shortage, expected to worsen over the next decade. While employment in creative industries appears to be robust at a sector level, the employment realities for graduates is more complex. For Australian university creative arts graduates, Census data contrasts with findings from the 2024 Graduate Outcomes Survey, which observed a 91.1% labour force participation rate – including both those employed and those actively seeking employment – but only a 79.3% overall employment rate and a comparatively low 48.4% full-time employment rate.<sup>11</sup> This was significantly lower than the 57.3% recorded in 2022, reflecting the sector’s increasing reliance on gig-based work and the challenges of gaining secure employment.

The skills university graduates require to navigate a precarious creative labour market have altered, impacting the education-to-employment transitions of creative industries graduates and the skills and qualities deemed most desirable by industry in relation to graduate employability.<sup>12</sup> Universities play a vital role in training the next generation of creative workers and in upskilling existing creative workers. Under the Australian Government’s Job-ready Graduates framework, ‘creative degrees’ are split across different funding clusters depending on the specific Field of Education. Visual and performing arts are included in Funding Cluster 2, while communication and many humanities-adjacent creative fields are in Cluster 1, which attracts a higher student contribution. On top of debts from participation in higher education, many workers in the creative and cultural sector experience high levels of employment precarity and income instability<sup>13</sup> which combine to create conditions of psychosocial risk and produce significant mental health and career sustainability consequences for the industry’s workers. For performer-adjacent workers in production and technical roles, the post-COVID landscape is marked by acute workforce shortages, heightened demands, and escalating work intensity.<sup>14</sup>

### Recommendation 4

Recognise and fund tertiary education programs as the start of a sustainable creative career that contributes to the broader national economy.

### Recommendation 5

Rollback student contributions for those undertaking undergraduate studies in Communication or Society and Culture from both an economic and social justice perspective.

<sup>8</sup> Ergas H (2025) There is a concerning shift happening in Australia’s arts sector. *The Australian*, October 31.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/books/commentisfree/2025/sep/06/the-end-of-meanjin-after-85-years-is-as-sad-as-it-is-infuriating>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/research-data/bureau-communications-arts-and-regional-research/arts-cultural-and-creative-activity>

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.qilt.edu.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2024-gos-national-report.pdf?sfvrsn=9f40f76\\_2](https://www.qilt.edu.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2024-gos-national-report.pdf?sfvrsn=9f40f76_2)

<sup>12</sup> Bridgstock R & D Jackson (2019) Strategic institutional approaches to graduate employability: navigating meanings, measurements and what really matters. *Journal of Higher Education Policy & Management*, 41(5), 468–484.

Dooley K, F Peng, S Neville & J McKibbin (2024) Mind the gap: A scoping review of skills gaps for graduates in the creative industries. *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education*, 23(4), 330–349.

<sup>13</sup> Whitford M and S Turner (2025) *Creative workforce scoping study report*. Service & Creative Skills Australia and Creative Australia. <https://creative.gov.au/research/creative-workforce-scoping-study>

<sup>14</sup> SaCSA (2025) *Progress in action: Arts workforce plan update, 2025*. Service & Creative Skills Australia.

More than half (52%) of creative arts workers regularly report high levels of fatigue and burn out and 43% identify job insecurity as a major source of their work stress.<sup>15</sup> Sector research has reported anxiety and depression rates substantially above population norms and elevated rates of suicidal ideation among performing artists and technical crew,<sup>16</sup> while an Australian national survey reported two-thirds of workers experienced high or very high levels of psychological distress, four times more than the general population distress rates.<sup>17</sup> Thus, despite the economic, cultural, and social significance of the performing arts sector, these conditions raise serious questions about the sustainability, retention, and productivity of the workforce. In response to these challenges, multiple calls for industry-wide structural reform have been made, including the need for systemic change to address insecurity and devaluation in creative careers<sup>18</sup>, industry-specific mental health strategies<sup>19</sup> and clearer identification and support pathways for creative workers in distress<sup>20</sup>. In some international jurisdictions the precarity and income instability of creative work has been addressed through labour policy which frames creative work as socially valuable work deserving stable state support rather than purely market-based survival. Initiatives such as Canada's *Status of The Artist Act 1992*, the European Parliament's legislative proposal to improve conditions of the artist (2023), the French unemployment insurance scheme for performing arts professionals,<sup>21</sup> and Ireland's Basic Income for the Arts pilot (2022-2025) and extensive Creative Ireland community investment<sup>22</sup> return the artist to the centre of national arts policies. There is an immediate opportunity for Australian policymakers to observe the efficacy of these programs and embrace their potential, aligning with UN SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth and UNESCO's *Status of the Artist* (1980).

#### Recommendation 6

Investigate the potential for introducing creative labour policies that improve income security, wellbeing, and workforce sustainability across the cultural sector including basic income for the arts grants to offset the financial instability for developing artists as they establish a regular income.

### The monopoly of Triple J as a barrier to audience development

The music industry in Australia is significantly undervalued both economically and culturally. Its impact on the broader creative industries, its role as an export market primary producer, and its cultural impact on Australian identity and quality of life continues to be underrepresented in cultural policy. At the centre of the music industry are intellectual property (IP) producers (songwriters and composers). In recent reporting, it is estimated that IP producers make up less than 15% of the people employed directly by the industry, without whom the industry would cease to exist at a domestic level. Barriers disrupting the development of audiences for emerging music markets include access and national oversight by way of peak bodies that may be part of the catalysing forces responsible for limiting artist development, diminishing live music venue presence, and amplifying non-Australian producers in the Australian marketplace. Three exemplar cases are presented: the role of Triple J in the Australian Music industry; the lack of competition in copyright collection authorities (APRA/AMCOS); and erroneous assumptions in the national reporting undertaken by Music Australia's *Bass Line* report.

Triple J, the national youth music broadcaster funded and operated by the federal government, may have undue influence on the audience development pathways for emerging Australian musicians. Triple J's historic competition with grassroots community radio has created a monopoly that impacts decision making by major industry stakeholders including promoters, managers, venues, booking agents, and musicians. This gradual monopolisation has resulted in a major barrier to audience development for emerging Australian musicians. Without major radio play support from Triple J, artists are unable to engage with the private sector infrastructure

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<sup>15</sup> Elmes A & E Riseley (2024) *Mental health and wellbeing in creative industries Australia: 2024*. Support Act.

<sup>16</sup> Throsby D and K Petetskaya. (2024). Artists as workers: An economic study of professional artists in Australia. Creative Australia. Van den Eynde J, A Fisher and C Soon (2017) *Working in the Australian entertainment industry: Final report*. Victoria University.

<sup>17</sup> Elmes A & J Knox (2022). *Mental health and wellbeing in music and live performing arts survey*, May 2022. Centre for Social Impact, Swinburne University.

<sup>18</sup> Gross SA and G Musgrave. (2020) *Can music make you sick? Measuring the price of musical ambition*. University of Westminster Press.

<sup>19</sup> Clements L (2022) *Scoping review of factors related to poor mental health & wellbeing within the performing arts sectors*. Equity. Everymind (2020) *Mind your own showbiz: Acting on the mental health needs of the Aust entertainment industry*. Everymind.

<sup>20</sup> Bartleet BL, C Ballico, D Bennett, R Bridgstock, P Draper, V Tomlinson and S Harrison (2019) Building sustainable portfolio careers in music. *Music Education Research*, 21(3), 282-294.

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.cnd.fr/fr/page/3783-faq-l-intermittence-du-spectacle>

<sup>22</sup> Department of Culture, Communications & Sport (2022) Basic income for the arts pilot scheme. Government of Ireland. <https://artscouncil.ie/funding/>

that exists to support them. In most cases, if Triple J does not provide high rotation radio play, booking agents, promoters and venues will not invest the capital required to tour emerging Australian artists. Triple J is viewed as the key audience development pathway for emerging musicians in Australia. Notably, Australia's commercial music operators (publishers and labels) are unable to break this barrier despite their significant resources. This barrier makes it difficult to reach employability targets and models of commercialisation for our student cohort. Despite its status as a 'national' broadcaster, Triple J is metropolitan focused and its representation of regional artists is limited. The broadcast radio funding model needs to provide community radio with capital to grow their market. A specific focus on multiple local radio outlets that come together under a national collaborative agreement could support disseminating musical work to national audiences without the undue influence of the national broadcaster.

#### Recommendation 7

Change the broadcast radio funding model to provide community radio with capital to grow their market.

### Collection of Performance Royalties and Representation Quotas

Regarding the collection of performance royalties for music IP producers, there is a similar case of monopoly by way of APRA/AMCOS. While APRA/AMCOS provide a meaningful service to their members, they have only one way of calculating performance royalty payments to artists which disadvantages emerging Australian artists. In most overseas domestic markets, there are multiple copyright collection agencies which allow emerging artists to negotiate higher rates, more effective terms, and better representation. A federal initiatives fund to support the development and delivery of alternative performance rights collection agencies across the country would ensure fair competition in the sector and provide artists with diversity of opportunity increasing agency and capacity.

#### Recommendation 11

Create a federal initiatives fund to support the development and delivery of alternative performance rights collection agencies to ensure fair competition and opportunity diversity for artists.

The streaming services at the heart of music IP dissemination require attention. The introduction of local and regional music representation quotas, as has been mandated for Netflix and other screen streaming services, would result in an increase in emerging Australian artist representation. Mandating Australian music quotas for *emerging* artists on Spotify and similar platforms would reduce dependence on more established Australian musicians (who are arguably already able to live on income derived from their music) to fulfill Australian representation quotas and increase emerging Australian artist representation.

#### Recommendation 9

Mandate music quotas for emerging Australian musicians on streaming services to increase representation of emerging Australian musicians alongside established musicians.

Neither the first (2024) nor second (2025) editions of Music Australia's *Bass Line* report include the work of cover musicians in the industry. Instead, the report focuses on *original music* and the economic impact of major international tours. In failing to include the work of covers musicians, the report fails to represent the day-to-day working musicians who play in pubs, clubs, and public spaces. This mode of work (covers) is central to many working musicians in Australia. To exclude it from reporting and data gathering results in a significant underreporting of the economic and cultural significance of the music industry. We estimate that more than 40% of the Australian domestic economic activity in the music industry has gone unaccounted of as a result of this omission. This omission is concerning as covers work is most commonly how emerging original musicians afford their basic quality of life while developing the relevant IP and audience required to attract investment, grow their careers, and contribute to the evolving Australian cultural identity.

#### Recommendation 10

Create a musicians' audience development grant scheme which provides the capital for artists to grow their audiences through touring and garnering broader radio support.

#### Recommendation 12

Fund an independent research project to comprehensively map the economic activity generated by covers musicians in pubs, clubs and public spaces, and recognise this as a legitimate income stream for practicing musicians.